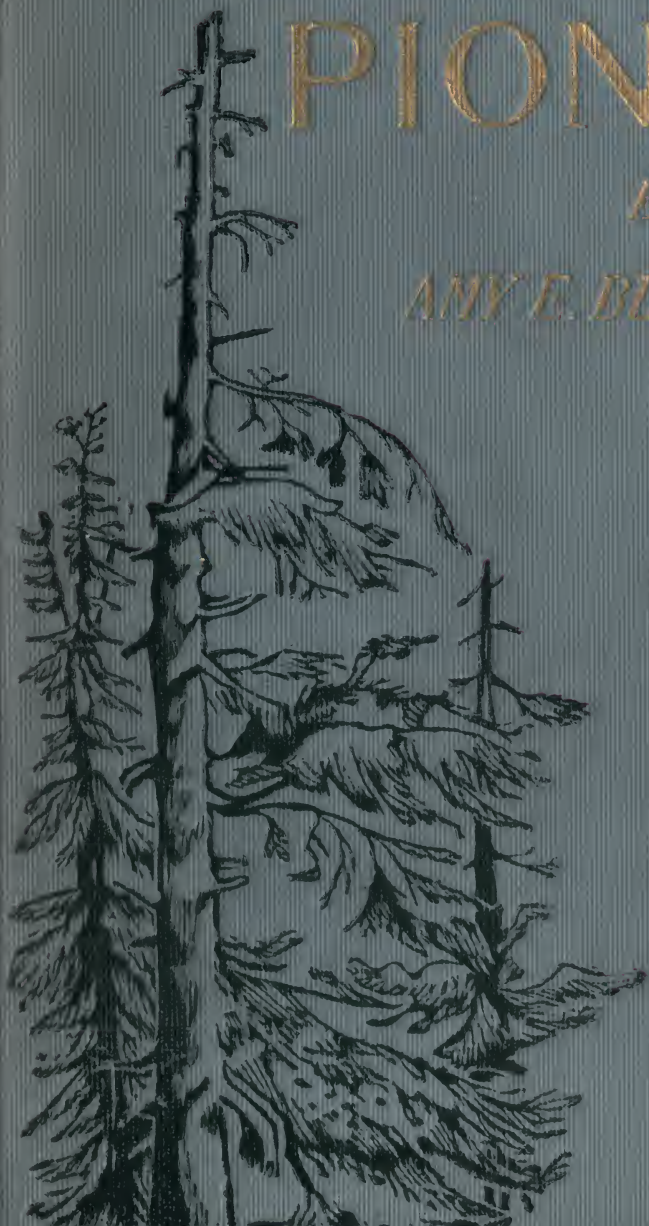


A GENTLE PIONEER

BY

AMY E. BLANCHARD

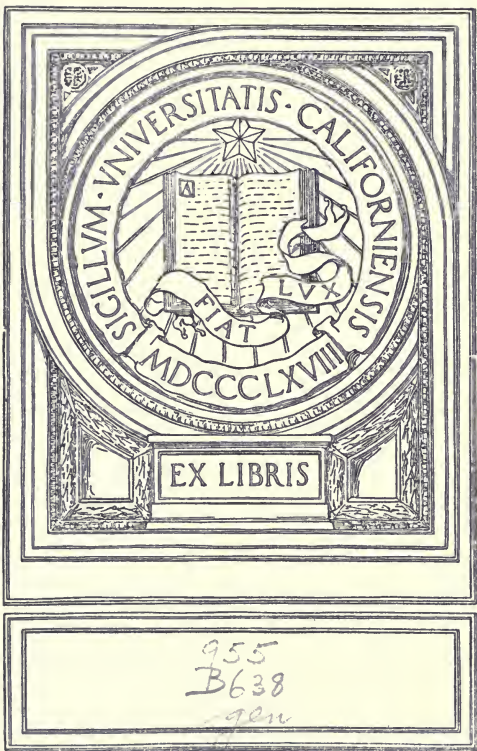




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SHE STOLE HER ARM AROUND HER FATHER'S NECK.

" A GENTLE PIONEER—

*BEING THE STORY OF THE EARLY
DAYS IN THE NEW WEST*

BY

AMY E. BLANCHARD

ILLUSTRATED BY

IDA WAUGH



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206

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A GENTLE PIONEER.

Published in July.

TO WHOM
ADDRESS

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A GENTLE PIONEER

CHAPTER I

EMIGRANTS

IT was a grave little company which sat around the big fireplace of the Kennedy farm-house one night in March. Outside the wind howled and blustered, and even though a huge log fire shot its flames in fine fashion up the wide chimney, there was necessity for sand-bags at the door, and for heavy homespun curtains at the windows to keep out the insistent draughts which would make their way through every chink and cranny. The younger children cuddled close together on the hearth, their mother from time to time looking up from her work to watch them thoughtfully; their father, silent and moody, gazed into the snapping fire, while Agnes herself, old enough to understand better than her brothers and sisters the cause of the unusual seriousness, paused more than once in her task of knitting to steal a glance at her parents.

At last Mrs. Kennedy aroused herself. "Come, bairns," she said, "it is long past bedtime. Off with you. I'll hear your prayers and see you safely tucked

in." Accustomed to prompt obedience, the children arose, Sandy and Margret, Jock and Jessie. Agnes alone stayed behind at a nod from her mother.

When the last little lagging foot had ceased to be heard upon the stair, the girl turned to her father and said, "I am going to sit up till you and mother go to bed, for this is the last night in a long time that we shall be together."

"Yes, in a long time," he sighed; and then Agnes, contradicting her own statement, returned: "Oh, no, not a long time; in a very little while we shall be able to send for them. Won't it be good, father, to see them all coming, Sandy and Margret and Jock and Jessie? You will go for them, and I will get a hot supper ready, and they will all be so surprised to see how fine a place a log-cabin can be. Think of it, this time next year we shall all be together again." She stole her arm around her father's neck and laid her cheek against his. "Aren't you glad I am going?" she asked with a little laugh.

"I am, my lass, though I misdoubt I am selfish in taking you from your mother."

"Sh! There she comes; we must look very cheerful. We were talking about what fun it will be when you and the children come," she said brightly, as her mother entered.

"Yes," was the reply, "but there's a weary time between."

"Oh, no, it will go very quickly, for there will be so much to do. First our going and then your getting off to Cousin Sarah's, and all that."

"Youth likes change," returned her mother, with a sigh, "but Agnes, child, it is not worth while your bidding here all night talking of it. Go to bed, my lass. To-morrow will come soon enough, no matter how late we sit up, and you have a long journey before you." She spoke so gravely that suddenly it came to Agnes that the exciting plan in which she was so deeply concerned meant more than change and adventure; it meant hardship and separations from those she loved; it meant long absence from her mother and the little ones; it meant the parting from old neighbors and the giving up of the old home where she was born. So she very soberly made her good nights and went to her chilly upper room with a serious countenance.

The wind whistling around the corners of the house, shrieking through the keyholes and sighing about the chimney, sounded particularly doleful to her that night as she lay snuggled down in the big feather-bed by the side of her little sister Margret, and she remained awake for a long time. Life had gone on evenly enough for all the fifteen years that this had been her home, and the boundaries of the big farm seemed likely to hedge her in for some years to come, but within a year her grandfather and grandmother had both died, and her father, who as the youngest child had always lived at home with

the old folks, now must possess only a share of the farm, and the elder brothers, already prosperous men, would claim their heritage.

"It was right of father not to be willing to settle down here on a little bit of a tract and have them all free enough with their advice but with nothing else," thought Agnes. "My uncles are a canny, thrifty set, but they save, and save, and never remember that but for his care of his parents my father, too, might own his own homestead, and grandfather forgot, too. Perhaps he thought the others would give the farm to father, — he ought to have it, — but they are too stingy to give it and he is too proud to ask it. I am glad my grandmother was not their mother, for father is far different. Dear father! Oh, yes, I am glad to go with him. He deserves to have all the comfort he can get after being treated so hardly by his family. We were always good comrades, my father and I; for I was the baby all those years before Sandy came, — three years." But the reckoning of years soon became lost in the land of dreams, and the song of the wind in the chimney was Agnes's last lullaby in the old home.

It was a bright sunny morning that Agnes and her father took for starting out upon their journey, the man on foot, and Agnes established in a sort of basket or creel made of willow and fastened to one side of the packhorse, balancing the burden of provisions and other necessities made in a bundle on the other. It was only

when she was tired that Agnes would ride, but she was resolved to start out in this fashion for the benefit of her brothers and sisters, assembled on the doorstep to see the start and vastly interested in the whole proceeding. There was another reason, too, why the girl established herself in her creel, for the parting between herself and her mother had been too much for them both, and the tears were raining down the little emigrant's cheeks as she quavered out, "Good-by, all." But the horse had scarcely started before she begged to stop, and, leaping out, she ran back to where her mother stood vainly striving to check the sobs which convulsed her. "Oh, mother, mother!" Agnes flung her arms around her neck and kissed the dear face again and again. "Don't forget me, mother. Good-by, once more."

"God keep you safe, my lamb," came the broken words, and Agnes ran back again to where her father, with bent head and lips compressed, waited for her. She climbed up into her creel again, and they started off with no more delay. As far as she could see Agnes watched first the group on the porch, then the white house, and last of all the familiar outline of field, hill, and dale. At last these, too, became but dim distance, and Agnes Kennedy had seen her old home for the last time.

The ride was made in silence for some distance, and then Agnes remembered that in the last talk early that morning her mother had said: "You must try and keep

a good heart in father, my child, for he is given to being despondent at times and is easily discouraged. It is a great cross for him to be parted from his family and to leave the safe and pleasant ways he has been accustomed to all his life, so try to cheer him all you can." Therefore Agnes from her creel called out: "I'm going to walk awhile, father; there'll be plenty of times when I shall have to ride. I might as well walk while I can, and, besides, I shall be nearer you."

Her father stopped, and then the two trudged together toward the town to which they were first going.

"I shall not be surprised," Agnes remarked, "if we have company when we are fairly on our way, for I hear there are trains and trains of wagons besides the packhorse going westward. I'd like a merry company, wouldn't you, daddy?"

Her father shook his head. "I misdoubt it, Nancy. I'm no one for new acquaintances, as ye weel know."

"Ah, but I am," returned Agnes, "and that's for why you are better when I am along. You don't draw so dour a face. It's no worse that we are doing than your grandfather did, and no so bad, for did he not leave his country and come across the ocean to this land? But no, it wasn't really his own country, Ireland, was it? for before that his father—or was it his grandfather?—fled from Scotland because he followed a Protestant king. Grandfather used to tell me about it all and the songs they sang. 'Scots wha hae wi'

Wallace bled ' ' she trolled out as she ran along, keeping step with her father's long strides. "And how far do we have to go before we come to the Ohio?" she asked after a while.

"Near two hundred miles," he told her.

"Let me see; we go ten miles to-day, which is nothing of a walk, and we spend the night in Carlisle, where you get another horse, and we go how far the next day?"

"Twenty-five or thirty, I think we can count on."

"And that much every day?"

"If the weather is good."

"Then in four or five days we shall go a hundred miles, and in a little over a week, say ten days, we shall get there. I wonder what it looks like."

"Not so very different from what you see now—a trifle wilder, mayhap. But I wouldn't count on our making it in ten days; when we are crossing the mountains, it will be sore work, verra rough travelling."

"Oh!" Agnes was a little disappointed. She thought it might be quite different and that the trip would be made in short order, delays not having entered into her calculations. However she resumed the conversation cheerfully. "Now let us talk about what we are going to do when we get there."

"My first step will be to get my land."

"And then stake it out," said Agnes, glad to display her knowledge of the necessary proceedings.

"Yes."

"And next?"

"Build a log-cabin."

"You'll have to cut down the trees first and then have — what do they call it? — a log-rolling."

"Yes, that will come first."

Agnes was silent a moment, then she began again. "Father, I never thought to ask before, but where are we going to sleep nights after we leave Carlisle?"

"We'll make the towns along the way as far as we can, and when we pass beyond them, we may find a booth or so or maybe a cabin here and there, put up for the use of travellers like ourselves. When we reach the river, I may conclude to get a broad, as your grandfather Muirhead did."

"What is a broad?"

"A broadhorn, they call it, is a flat boat to be used in shallow water to carry a family's belongings."

Agnes smiled; this was such an adventurous way of going. The boat, particularly, gave her a feeling of novelty. "I hope you will get a boat; it would be a diversion to travel that way, and then no one would have to walk, not even you, Donald." She patted the horse affectionately. "Go on, father. Where do we get the boat?"

"That I cannot say exactly. It may be at Fort Pitt or it may be at some other place. I am going to hunt up your cousin James at Uniontown, and we'll see then."

With this sort of talk and with long periods of silence the day wore on till, late in the afternoon, they approached Carlisle, and there the first stop was made. It was quite a familiar journey to this point, but from there on the way led through a part of the country unknown to Agnes, and the day's travels became wilder and wilder as they approached the mountains. It was then that Agnes understood her father's smile when she first insisted upon the twenty-five miles a day, saying that it could be easily covered, for many a night it was a very weary girl who crept into whatever shelter was afforded her, and slept so soundly that not even the cry of an owl or the distant scream of a wildcat could arouse her.

But at last the mountains were passed, and one day they stopped at a small village consisting of a few houses and a store. It was on the line of the emigrant's road to western Virginia and Ohio, and here stores were laid in by the pioneer who did not want to transport too much stuff across the mountains. Here halted more than one emigrant train, and, as Agnes and her father drew up before the house that with small pretension was denoted an inn, they saw in the muddy street several canvas-covered wagons. "Ho, for the Ohio!" Agnes read upon one of these vehicles. She laughed, and at the same time her eyes met the merry ones of a girl peeping out from the wagon just ahead. With a little cry of pleasure Agnes ran forward. "Ah, Jeanie M'Clean, is

it you? Who would have thought it? A year ago you went away and you are still going."

"Indeed, I am then," returned Jeanie. "Father has the fever as well as many another, and he says we shall have better luck if we be moving on than if we stayed where we were, so we're bound for the Ohio this time, and it's glad we'll be to have you join us, if you go that way."

"We do go that way, and I shall be glad when my father cries, 'Stop!' How long do you stay here, and where is your halting-place to be at last?"

"We stay till to-morrow, and we are going somewhere this side of Marietta. The oxen are not fast travellers, not half as fast as the packhorses, but it is an easy way for us women folks. Aren't you tired of your creel?"

"Indeed am I, but it seemed the best way for me to come when there are but two of us. Mother and the children will follow as soon as we are well settled. I think father will maybe get a broadhorn, though maybe not. I hope he will, for it seems to me it would be the most comfortable way of travelling."

"So many think; and it is no loss, for they use the boats after in building their houses. We have our wagon and get along very well. See how comfortable it is. Climb up and look."

Agnes did as she was bid, and indeed the monstrous wagon looked quite like a little room with its feather-

beds and stools, its pots, pans, spinning-wheel, and even the cradle swung from its rounded top. "It is comfortable," she acknowledged; "far more so than the creel. I'd like to travel so, I think, but I must follow my father's will, of course. I see him there now, Jeanie, talking to your father."

"I hope daddy will persuade him to join our train; the more the merrier and the — safer. Oh, Agnes, shall you fear the Indians?"

"I don't think so. There is no war at this time and they should not be hostile, father says. I am more afraid of the wild beasts. Oh, how lonely it was some nights when we were coming over the mountains and could hear the wolves howling and the wildcats screaming so near us. Many a time I wished myself safe at home in my little bed with Margret. I would like to join your train, Jeanie, for my father is not a great talker, and there are days when we jog along and I tire more of keeping my tongue still than I do of keeping my legs going."

Jeanie laughed. "Here come our fathers. Now we will hear what they have to say."

"The inn is full, Agnes," said Fergus Kennedy, "though I may be able to get a corner on the floor with some others. But what about you? We will have to see if some of the good people in the village will take you in."

"Indeed, then," spoke up Joseph M'Clean, "she'll

not have to go that far. We've room enough on our beds for one more, and she'll be welcome to a place by Jeanie, I'll warrant."

"She'll be that," Jeanie spoke up, "so you'll not look further, Agnes. Will we camp farther on, father?"

"Yes, just a pace beyond, where Archie has taken the cattle." Agnes looked to where she could see a couple of packhorses, two cows, a yellow dog, and two small pigs, these last being in a creel slung at the side of one of the horses. Underneath the wagon swung a coop full of chickens. Joseph M'Clean was well stocked up. When the baby was safely in its cradle slung overhead, and Mrs. M'Clean and the children were ensconced in a row on the feather-bed, Agnes found herself occupying the outside place, a fact for which she was thankful, and not even the strangeness of the position kept her awake long.

She was awakened bright and early by the general uprising of the family and by the sound of Archie's voice calling, "Mother, mother, sun's up." And so the day began. Later on, when Agnes's father sought her, it was to say that he had concluded to join Joseph M'Clean and his friends. "I'll feel better to be by those I've known since childhood than in the neighborhood of strangers," he declared, "and Joseph says there's land enough for all. I did think of going further away to hunt up that property of your grandfather Muirhead's, — it was what your mother wanted, — but I've concluded

to settle this side. So we'll go along with our friends, and I don't doubt but you'll be better satisfied, Agnes."

Therefore the rest of the way Agnes, for the most part, kept her place by Jeanie in the big wagon, or, when tired of sitting still, the two would get out and keep pace with the slow-going oxen, while the pack-horses went on ahead. In this manner they covered the whole distance, camping at night, and starting off betimes in the morning, the line of white-covered wagons winding along the rough roads slowly but surely, and each day bringing the little band of emigrants nearer to their destination, though Agnes found the ten days had lengthened into weeks before they came to their final stop on the banks of the Ohio.

This long-looked-for moment arrived, there was much excitement and much running to and fro. The men stalked about gesticulating and pointing out the various features of the landscape; the women gathered together in groups, laughing and talking; the more adventurous children wanted to form exploring parties at once, while the timid ones clung close to their mothers, awed by the deep, impenetrable forest in which all sorts of dangers, real or fancied, lurked. Then one after another the little cabins were erected of rough, hewn logs, and in a short time all of them were snuggled down, each in its little hollow, where the newly chopped stumps indicated a clearing. There was, too, a stockade and fort not too far distant, for Indians were not to be trusted, even in

times of peace, and the shelter of the stockade would be necessary when there came a warning.

It was quite summer by the time Agnes and her father took possession of their home in the wonderful, mysterious forest. A humble little house it was with its rude chimney plastered with clay, its unglazed windows with their heavy wooden shutters. Its great fireplace in the one room was where Agnes would cook the daily meals; the little loft overhead, reached by a rough ladder, was her bedroom. Skins of wild animals composed her bed and coverlet, and the daily food would be found close at hand,—game from the forest, milk from the cow they had bought, and porridge or mush from meal which they ground themselves.

Jeanie M'Clean, half a mile on one side, and the O'Neills, half a mile the other, were the nearest neighbors, so that, with her father busy all day in the woods hunting or clearing his land, it was rather a lonely life for the girl used to a family of brothers and sisters, and with a mother to consult with and direct her. Yet it was a very free life; and the little log-cabin an easy house to keep, consequently Agnes could almost daily find time to run through the woods for a chat with Jeanie M'Clean, though it was to good-natured, kind-hearted Polly O'Neill that she took her troubles. Polly, with just a taste of the brogue and her cheery face, was a good companion when one felt doncy.

Nothing seemed to bother Polly; and if her four children, the eldest nothing more than a baby, all clung to her skirts at once, it did not seem to interfere with her movements. Jimmy O'Neill had set up his forge there in the wilderness, and as the blacksmith was a very important figure in the community where men must make many of their own farming implements, there was generally a company to be seen and news to be had at Polly's, and Agnes congratulated herself that she lived so near.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSEWARMING

IT was to Polly that Agnes went one afternoon when her father had been absent all day and the gloom of the great encircling forest had oppressed her more than usual. Polly was bustling about, singing happily, when Agnes appeared at the door of the cabin. "Is it yersel', Nancy, child? Come right in," was the greeting. "Jerry, lad, get a stool for Nancy. The bairnies do be all in a pother agen I get their bit of supper, so I'll go on with it, Nancy."

"Isn't it early for supper?" asked Agnes, sitting down and picking up the baby who was crawling about on the puncheon floor.

"Early it is; but if there was ten meals the day, they'd get hungry between 'em, and the porritch is all gone, so I'm makin' more, for when they see the pot's empty they begin to cry. As if," she surveyed the group smiling, "their mother didn't know where to get more. And how goes the world with ye, Nancy?"

"It goes a wee bit dour to-day," said Agnes, sighing. "Father has been gone all day to the far clearing, and

there's no one for me to talk to but the squirrels and the birds."

"And it's lame yer tongue gets from the long rest. Sure you've a nimble tongue, I notice, Nancy, and it's hard to keep it restin'."

Agnes laughed. "So it is, but I didn't suppose you had noticed that."

"It 'ud be hard not. I mind the last time ye were here with Archie M'Clean that sorry a word could he get in."

"Oh, Archie, he doesn't talk even when one is still, and to sit hours at a time gazing at another is not to my liking."

"Puir Archie; he uses his eyes if not his tongue, and what is one better than the other to use?"

"I'd rather a wagging tongue than a blinking eye; it's more cheerful," responded Agnes.

"I misdoubt it when the tongue wags to your discredit," returned Polly. "But, my fathers! who's a longer tongue than mesel'? An' I'm not one to run down me own most spakin' attrbyutes."

"Ah, but you never speak ill of any one, Polly. Here, let me stir the mush and you take the baby; he is fretting for you."

"He's frettin' for his sleep," said Polly. "Sure he's wor'd out with creepin' the floor. I'll put him in his cradle and he'll drop off." She drew the cradle from the corner; a queer little affair it was, made of a barrel

sawed across halfway, then lengthwise, and set upon clumsy rockers, but baby found his bearskin as soft as any mattress could be, and the lullaby of his little four-year-old sister as sweet as any music.

"Land! but I clane forgot to tell ye," exclaimed Polly, when the baby was settled; "there's to be a housewarming next week."

"Oh, whose?" cried Agnes.

"Johnny McCormick's."

"Then he's married."

"Married he is. He fetched his bride home from Marietta yesterday. They're at his brother's. They're to have the housewarming next week."

"Oh, Polly, will you be going?"

"Will I? Was I ever absent from a scutching frolic, or a corn-shucking, or a housewarming, or the like? Tell me that, Nancy Kennedy."

Agnes made no answer, but sat watching Polly ladling out her bubbling mass of mush. "What fine new bowls you have, Polly," she said.

"Jimmy, my man, made 'em o' nights. He's a crackerjack at anything like that, is Jimmy. Come, children, set by." And putting a piggin of milk on the table, Polly placed the bowls in their places while the children stood around, the younger ones in glee, beating on the table with their wooden spoons.

"I must run home now," said Agnes, "for my father will be in, and I must get his supper, and the cows are

to be brought up. I'll get them on the way back if they have not strayed too far."

"Ye'll no stay and sup with the children? Jimmy and I will have our bite when he comes in."

"No, thank you. I don't want to be late getting home. The woods are dark enough by day, and when the evening comes, it's worse. I'll keep along by the river bank where it's lighter. Father shot a wildcat yesterday. We are getting quite a pile of skins against the winter."

"They're very useful," said Polly. "I'll show ye how to make yersel' a jacket; you'll be wantin' wan by the cold weather, and squirrel skin makes a fine one. They're a pest, the gray squirrels, but they're not so bad to eat, and the skins, though small, are warm and soft."

"I've shot a number of them, though I hate to; they are so pretty and so frisky and friendly."

"They're far too friendly — they are so plentiful and eat up all our corn; and, after all, it is better that we should kill them mercifully than that they should be torn asunder by wild beasts."

"That is what father says."

"And father's right; our corn crops will be small enough if we allow all the squirrels to help themselves. Well, good-by, Nancy; don't forget the housewarming."

"I'll not." And Agnes took her way along the narrow bridle-path toward the river, glad to find it was

lighter outside than in the dim cabin, the windows of which, covered with linen smeared with bear's grease, did not admit much light. Still it was later than she cared to be out alone, brave though she was, and accustomed to the dangers of the forest, and she was more than usually glad to meet Archie M'Clean coming through the woods with his cows.

"Have you seen anything of Sukey?" Agnes called.

Archie paused to think, then answered. "She's over there a bit. I'll go fetch her for you."

"Oh, no, don't do that. I can get her if you tell me where she is."

But Archie was striding down the path and Agnes stood still waiting, keeping an eye the while on Archie's cows. Presently the familiar tinkle of Sukey's bell announced her approach, then the girl and the lad slowly followed the cows along the river's bank, Agnes doing most of the talking, but Archie her willing listener.

The little settlement was slowly increasing. More than one young man, though he possessed little beyond his rifle, his horse, and his axe; was ready to marry the girl of his choice, who would take her wedding journey through the silent woods and would become mistress of the small farm whose acres could be increased indefinitely with little trouble. Therefore, when young John McCormick began to make ready for his bride, there were neighbors enough to join in and help to chop and roll the logs, and next to raise the house itself.

Jeanie and Agnes were quite excited over the frolic, for, so far, not many such had come to them. While the men were busy doing their part in establishing the young couple, the women of the community willingly turned their attention to the preparation of the feast, though John's rifle brought in the bear and venison. Agnes had promised to go over to help the M'Cleans do their part, and had quite looked forward to the day. She was hurriedly putting an end to her morning's work when she heard a sound outside. The door stood open, and the September sunshine flooded the little dim room. On a bench by the door was a bowl in which were two or three squirrels newly skinned and ready to be cooked. Agnes meant to have them for her father's supper. She turned to get the bowl, when in at the door was thrust the muzzle of a gaunt wolf, which, scenting the fresh meat, had come to investigate. For a second Agnes was paralyzed with fear, and the next moment, considering discretion the better part of valor, she sprang to the ladder leading to the loft and climbed up, leaving the rifle, which she knew well how to use, below. The squirrels were young and tender and the wolf was hungry, so he made short work of them, yet they were only a mouthful and but whetted his appetite. Agnes, peering below, saw the great, ferocious creature sniffing the ladder and looking up at the loft. He meditated an attack. She tugged at the ladder and presently had it safely drawn up into the loft beside her. There

were snarls and growls below, and the wolf began to make fierce springs for his prey. "If I only had my rifle," murmured Agnes, "I would shoot him. How fine it would be to do that all by myself." But the rifle was beyond her reach, and she began to feel herself lucky, as the wolf leaped higher and higher, if she could keep beyond the reach of the sharp fangs.

There was no trap-door to the little loft, but Agnes laid the ladder across it, hoping that, though the rungs would give the creature something to clutch, it would perhaps prevent him from doing more. After a while the leaping ceased, and the wolf, sitting on his haunches below there, snarled and showed his teeth; but now Agnes, being satisfied that he could not reach her, felt her fear subsiding, and the situation, instead of being exciting, became rather tiresome. She was missing the fun at the M'Cleans'. She wondered how much longer she was to be kept prisoner by this ugly creature. He did not seem disposed to go away. Perhaps he would keep her there all day. Wolves were not apt to come around in the daytime, especially at this season, though at night it was safer to shut windows and doors against them. This one must have been pursued by some hunter, and had come suddenly upon the cabin. Agnes peered down at him from between the rungs of the ladder, and thought he was a very unattractive brute as he sat there with his red tongue lolling out. "I'd like your hide, you ugly beast," she said, "but I don't

want you to get mine. I think I'll drag my bed across the ladder, and then if he can't see me, perhaps he will go away."

This proceeding, however, seemed only to increase the wolf's ambition to get upstairs, for he flung himself madly into the air and once came so near that Agnes's heart stood still. Yet he came no nearer, and the long day wore on — a doleful day indeed. Agnes could not expect any one to come to her assistance, for her father, knowing her intention of going to the M'Cleans', had taken his lunch with him and had gone to the aid of Johnny McCormick, like the rest of the men in the settlement.

It was late in the afternoon that Agnes at last heard some one call "Agnes! Agnes! Nancy Kennedy, where are you?" Then there was the sudden crack of a rifle. The girl pulled aside the bearskin which made her bed and peeped below. On the floor lay the gray form of the wolf, and over it stood Archie M'Clean. "Agnes, oh, Agnes," he cried, "are you hurt?"

From above came the answer: "No, I am quite safe. I'll put the ladder back and come down. I am so glad you have killed that horrible wolf. He has kept me up here all day. How did you happen to come?" she asked, when she was safe by Archie's side.

"We wondered why you didn't come as you promised, and Jeanie said she was afraid something had happened, so when I came out for the cows, I stopped to see."

"And found the wolf. Well, he has kept me a prisoner all day besides eating up my father's supper."

"Never mind, his skin will be very comfortable for you on the floor."

"Oh, but it's yours; you killed him."

"I think you deserve it, for you kept him there all day so I could kill him when I came along."

"That's one way of putting it," said Agnes, laughing.

"I'll come back and skin him for you when I have taken the cows home. Perhaps I can shoot something for your father's supper, too, on my way."

"Oh, never mind that; he's sure to bring home something, for he has gone to the McCormick's new house, and that is some distance. But come back, do, and help me get my supper. I shall shut the door and window tight after this, for I want no more wolves for company, though I'd rather it were a wolf than an Indian."

"Your father expected that you were at our house," said Archie, "perhaps you had better come with me."

"I must get the cow up first. Can you wait?"

"Well enough. I will get our own cows at the same time; then while you are milking, I will skin the wolf, and then we can go together."

The tinkle of the cow-bells sounded not so far off and it was not long before Archie and Agnes were trudging along side by side, the carcass of the wolf having been thrown into the river and the hide stretched for drying.

"And why didn't you go to the house-raising?" asked Agnes.

"Because I was needed at home."

"What will they be doing to-day?"

"They'll finish up the odds and ends; make some tables and stools and benches and get it ready for to-morrow."

"Then will come the housewarming. Did your mother and Jeanie get through all they expected?"

"Yes, and they have a good feast for John. I am going to build a house when I am twenty-one."

Agnes laughed. "Whom will you put in it?" she asked saucily.

"You."

"Archie M'Clean! How do you know you will?"

"I say I will," he replied doggedly. "I've as good a right as any one to choose my girl. I am eighteen, and many of the boys marry at my age; but if I wait three years, you will be eighteen then."

"Oh, but — No, no, Archie, I'm too young yet to think of such a thing. My father needs me, and my mother will be coming. I'll think of nobody, of no lad, till I see my mother again. In three years — why, who knows? — you may change your mind; there'll be many another girl in the settlement by then."

"And many another lad, maybe."

"Well, then, so much the better."

"I'll not change my mind," said Archie. "I'm not a

great talker, Agnes, but I know what I want, and when I make up my mind I keep to it."

"And when did you make up your mind to build your house?"

"That day when I saw you, when we were on the road here, and you were riding with Jeanie in the wagon. It was four months ago."

"You'll be telling another tale four years from now. I'm too young; fifteen isn't old enough to make any promises."

"It's as old as my mother was."

"Maybe, but what is one man's meat is another man's poison."

"Am I poison?"

"No; but that isn't what I mean. Oh, no more nonsense, Archie, or I shall have to stay away from the housewarming, and that I do not want to do."

They were within sight of the M'Clean cabin, and Agnes ran on ahead, but, seeing Jeanie standing there, she ran back to Archie. "Don't tell any one," she said.

"Tell what? About the wolf?"

"No, about — about what you said."

He nodded, and Agnes knew the secret was safe.

"Well, well, why didn't you come before?" asked Jeanie, when Agnes was within hearing.

"I couldn't; I had company."

"Why didn't you bring the company? They would have been very welcome."

"No, he wouldn't." Agnes shook her head decidedly.

"Why, Nancy Kennedy, you know he would."

"I know he wouldn't."

"What was his name?"

"Mr. Wolf."

Jeanie looked puzzled. "I never heard of him. Is he an old friend? Did he come from Carlisle?"

"No, he did live near here."

"Doesn't he now?"

"No, he's dead." Agnes laughed.

"I never heard of such a thing. What are you talking about? Mother, you never heard such talk. Come here and make Nancy tell us what she means."

Agnes laughed at Jeanie's vehemence; then she sobered down. "It was no laughing matter, I can tell you, and but for Archie I might not be here now." And she proceeded to tell the tale of her day's imprisonment.

"Why, you must be half starved!" exclaimed Mrs. M'Clean.

"No; the wolf left me a piece of johnny-cake and I drank some new milk, then we found some late blackberries as we came along."

"Well, you will be glad of a good bowl of hominy. Come in. Father'll not be back yet. Here comes Archie with the milk-pails."

After her long day of solitude it was good, Agnes

thought, to get among her friends, and she chattered away like a magpie, yet she was conscious of Archie's gaze fixed upon her, and she felt uncomfortable, wishing he had left their free comradeship as it stood. "I am a little girl still. I want to be a little girl," she announced suddenly, "and I don't believe I will go to the housewarming."

"Nancy Kennedy! Why not?" exclaimed Jeanie. "There will be other girls there no older than you. There is Susan Duncan and Flora Magruder, and even little Meg Donaldson is going."

"I know — but —"

"No buts about it. What a whimsey! Of course you'll go. There will be good sport, and no end of feasting. I don't see how you can think of staying at home." She was so persistent that finally Agnes acknowledged that it was but a sudden whim, and that she really wanted to go.

It was a homely, but jolly, little company which gathered in the new log-cabin of John McCormick to celebrate the housewarming. The rough pioneers in their hunting-shirts, leather breeches, and moccasins were a manly set of fellows; while the girls in linsey-woolsey petticoats, with linen bed-gowns, a handkerchief folded across the breast, their feet shod in coarse shoe-packs, were fit companions for the sturdy brothers, husbands, and fathers, who outnumbered them. Agnes, being one of the few who had recently come from a



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AGNES SLIPPED OFF TO A CORNER WHERE JEANIE FOUND HER.



more civilized neighborhood, could boast better shoes and a finer kerchief. She was shy, however, and kept close to Polly O'Neill, until that lively body joined some gossiping friends, and then Agnes slipped off to a corner where Jeanie joined her, and together they watched the scene.

"Ah, but Polly is a romp; I'd fain have her agility," said Jeanie, admiringly.

Agnes laughed as Polly belabored a stout lad who captured her in a rollicking game, but she yawned the next minute and said: "I'm sleepy. Does one have to stay up all night?"

"Indeed, yes. You'll have no chance to sleep. We shall have to hang on till morning or they will hunt us out and parade us up and down the floor. Here is something to waken you up. Supper is ready."

Agnes rose with alacrity, and the company trooped to the table which was nothing more than a slab of wood supported by four round legs set in auger holes. It was set with bent and dented pewter ware, rude wooden bowls, and trenchers. A few pewter and horn spoons, but no knives were visible; the men used their hunting-knives which they drew from a sheath hanging from their hunting-belts.

But hardly had they begun to attack the venison and bear meat, the roasted corn, and johnny-cakes, before the door was flung open and an express whispered hoarsely, "Indians!"

Agnes clutched Jeanie. "Where is my father?" she whispered. "Oh, what shall we do?"

"To the blockhouse!" The word was passed; then quickly lights were extinguished, and creeping slowly along in the darkness the whole company started forth, not knowing what moment the terrible yell of an Indian would startle them, or whether they could reach their refuge unhurt. Every one was silent as death. The dreaded word "Indians!" silenced even the smallest child who, clinging to its mother, understood something of the terror which inspired the older ones.

Close by Agnes's side strode Archie. "They shall kill me before they take you," he whispered.

But there was no need for his heroics, for once within the blockhouse they were safe, the Indians rarely attacking these little forts. It was found, however, that all were not gathered in the retreat, and that those who, for one reason or another, had not been at the housewarming were in danger.

"My father was off hunting," said Agnes, pitifully. "He does not care for frolics, you know. Oh, if the Indians have found him, what shall I do?"

"Never fear, my lass," Polly tried to reassure her. "I've no doubt he is hiding, and when the redskins go off, he'll come in safe and sound."

This was comforting, but still Agnes had her fears as one after another of the stragglers crept back to the fort, each with some new report. "Tell us your

news, Sandy," were the words which greeted the last comer.

"The Indians are burning and plundering the cabins," he told them. "I sneaked around through the woods and got here safely. I don't think there are many of them, just a small raiding party. They have made a dash, and will be off again presently. They'll not attack the fort."

"Did you see my father?" Agnes asked fearfully.

The man was silent a moment, then he answered: "I left him an hour since on his way here. Hasn't he come?"

"No; oh, no."

"Then he's likely laying low. Don't fret, my lass; he'll be coming along after a while."

With the rising of the sun the Indians disappeared. They were too few in number to attack the fort, and had counted on surprising the inhabitants of the little settlement in their homes. Fortunately most of them were at the housewarming, and those who were not present were warned in time to escape. The little hunting party, of which Fergus Kennedy was one, were the only persons in real danger, and of the number all had now returned but two. But many of the little cabins were burned to the ground and the cattle slain.

At the return of her husband who had gone out to reconnoitre, and who returned with the news that all was quiet, Polly looked around at the buckets of water

which she had lugged in, and exclaimed: "Well, I needn't a' put my stren'th in thim buckets. I'd better saved it."

"But suppose the Indians had come and had tried to fire the blockhouse," said Jeanie.

"Ah, but there's no supposin'; they didn't."

"But we have to be prepared, and we were all glad to have something to do in an hour of peril," said Mrs. M'Clean, "though I, for one, have no pleasure in constant alarm. I am for going to a more settled-up place. I'm willing to move on if my man gives the word. I mistrusted we were too far from ceevilization."

"Ay, ay! ye may feel that a ways," returned Polly, "but I'll no let the pesky critturs get the best o' me, and I'll not move on fur 'em. Here I bide. I am as good a shot as they are, an' one can die but wanst."

"Ay, but it's not the dying; it's the being carried off from home and kin, and having your babies murdered before your eyes, and your husband tortured in your presence."

"Sh!" whispered Polly, for there was Agnes at her elbow, eyes wide open with fear and cheeks pale. "I'm not scared," Polly went on valiantly, with a nod to Agnes. "We've the good strong blockhouse, and we can bide here till the cabin's built again, if so be it is burnded, which I'm not so certain it is, an' we're as safe wan place as anither. Those that's born to be drowneded will niver get hung, sez I," she went on with a true

Presbyterian belief in the doctrine of predestination, "an' if I'm kilt entirely by a tomahawk, sure I'll not die of the pox, an' the former's the speedier. I may lose me hair but not me beauty."

"I'd rather keep both if I can," returned Mrs. M'Clean, laughing.

Polly grinned. "Sure, ye'll have little trubble kapin' what ye've not got," she replied saucily. At which Mrs. M'Clean took her by the shoulders and shook her so hard that Polly's mass of black hair tumbled down in a big coil to her knees. She gathered it up in both hands, and put it back under her cap, laughing at Mrs. M'Clean's look. "Eh, Jean," she said, "I'm thinkin' ye'll not be likely to lose yer scalp; there's so little hair ye hev to take a holt on."

"You're a saucy creature, Polly," Mrs. M'Clean replied. "I've not your crop on my head, I know, but neither have I so much on my lip." Polly's mouth was ornamented by quite a visible mustache, and the laugh was against her, so she gave in cheerfully and turned away.

Seeing Agnes standing aloof with mournful eyes, she went up to her and took her in her arms. "We're a thriflin' set, my dear," she said, "but it's the relief to the moind and the cessaytion of worriment that makes one so light. An' yer in trubble, but don't ye give up whilst there's a loophole. Manny a one's been carried off and has escaped, afther years sometimes, so I'd not mourn yet."

"Ah! but, Polly, if he's been killed or taken prisoner, what shall I do?"

"Ye've twenty or more homes waitin' fur ye, an' ye kin begin with mine, an' stay there till ye weary av it, thin move on to the next." She indicated the direction of her dwelling by a toss of her head. "It's still standin', I'm told, and back we'll go."

"But if the Indians come again."

"They'll not at wance, I'm sure. They know we're too many fur 'em. But if ye'd rather stay here in the fort, suit yoursel', and we'll all be pleased."

"I think I'll stay here," Agnes replied after a moment's thought, "for it is here father would come first."

"Ye've hit the nail on the head. To be sure he would, but ye know ye're welcome to my last bite and sup."

"Indeed I do, you good Polly. You are a real comfort." At which speech Polly wiped her eyes on her sleeve, for her transitions from laughter to tears were generally as sudden as the opposite.

CHAPTER III

A SEARCH

THAT evening Polly returned to her own home, but the M'Cleans remained at the fort, and the next day Jeanie told Agnes that her mother was bent upon going nearer to the settlement of Marietta, that, now their cabin was burned and all their stock killed, they would be better off if they went farther on.

"Near Marietta?" exclaimed Agnes. "That is where we were to have gone. If my father were only here, we might go with you and search out the land belonging to my grandfather; then we could send for my mother." She was silent a moment. "I think," she continued slowly, "I will do it, anyhow, as soon as—as we know the worst about my father."

"You do it?"

"Yes, why not?"

"How could you do it alone?"

"I could get some one to help me. I would never be satisfied to stay here by myself, and how could I go back to my mother and tell her there was no home in the wide world for her and the children? There

are many coming out this way, but few going back."

"That is true. Why don't you talk to my father about it?"

"I will," and that very evening she told Mr. M'Clean the story.

"It might be worth while," he said, "though perhaps it would not. Land is plentiful, and if there should be any trouble, I would not advise you to get into it."

"I know land is plentiful, but this is a cleared farm, with a good house on it. My grandfather was killed by the Indians, and this is his place which now belongs to my mother, to be had for the taking."

"Then come with us, and I will help you to your rights if it is to be done."

"But my father—if he should come back?"

Joseph M'Clean laid his hand gently upon the child's auburn hair. "Ye can scarce expect it, for we've searched for him and he's not to be found."

Agnes choked back the sob that rose in her throat. "I know," she said bravely, "but I am not going to give up hope. He may be lying wounded somewhere, and I am going to look for him myself. I feel sure I could find him if he is to be found."

"Ye're a brave lass, Nancy," said the man, his own eyes moist. "I'll go with ye, lass. It's a rough country we're in, and ye are not to go alone. We'll start

another search for your father, for maybe, as you say, he's wounded and can't get here by himself."

Agnes looked up at him gratefully, for his was the first encouragement she had received that day.

"It'll be a rough tramp for ye, and maybe a dangerous one," said Jimmy O'Neill the next day, as he saw Agnes ready to accompany the search party. "There's Archie and Joe M'Clean besides mesel', and we'll not lave a stone unturned."

"But I must go," Agnes returned wistfully. "If you should find him, I would know that much sooner by being with you. I'm not afraid, and I am a good walker. I've travelled many a mile a-foot when father and I were coming here."

Jimmy looked at Mr. M'Clean, who nodded as if in agreement, and said: "Weel, if ye grow weary, we can send you back with Archie, so we'll let you go, lass, and may God direct us," he added piously.

Through the dim, deep forest they took their way, following such trails as they could find, and noticing the turn of a leaf, a broken twig, and those clews which only a woodsman would look for. The two men stalked on ahead, rifles on shoulder. Agnes and Archie followed, their moccasined feet treading the shining leaves pressed down by the footsteps of the Indian raiders. The summer was over and the settlers had thought themselves safe from Indian raids, but when the warm hazy weather which November so

often brings had come upon them, it was a favorable time for the Indians to sally forth again, bent upon plunder. For this reason this late mild weather was called "Indian summer." They followed the trail for some time, Agnes's eyes alert as any to discover anything which might suggest a possibility of her father's near presence.

Suddenly she gave a quick exclamation. Sticking to a bramble by the side of the way was a bit of fur. The men came to an immediate halt at the sound of her voice. "See!" she cried. "It is a bit of some one's coonskin cap." She examined the edges as she plucked it from the thorny bush.

"It has been shot away," said Archie, as intent as she upon the clew.

"You're sure it is not the skin of some creature shot by some one?" Agnes asked anxiously.

"No, it is dressed skin, not freshly killed," said Archie.

They glanced around. A little farther on was a shallow brook, on the borders of which there were trampled weeds, as if some large body had passed through. Agnes looked with imploring, questioning eyes at Jimmy O'Neill as he raised himself up after an examination of the spot. "It's worth following," he said in reply. "We'll go upstream a ways."

Agnes at the word dashed on ahead, unheeding the brambles or the sharp boughs which lashed her face

at every step. Archie, with long strides, kept close behind her, and was by her side when suddenly she swooped down with a cry, in which joy and fear were mingled, and gathered up in her arms the head of a man lying as still as death by the brookside. "Father! Father!" cried the girl. "Speak to me! Oh, he can't be dead! Archie! Archie! tell me he is not." She chafed the cold hands, and laid her cheek against the quiet face.

"She's found him!" cried Archie, as his father came up. "But I think he's dead," he said in a low voice. Joseph M'Clean was on his knees by the man's side in a moment, and was pouring some spirits between the clenched teeth.

Presently there was the faintest movement. "He is alive! alive!" cried Agnes. "Oh, how thankful I am!"

"He's alive, sure enough," said Jimmy O'Neill, "but begorry! I thought him clane gone whin I clapped me eyes on him. Give him a drop more from Black Betty, Archie, and he'll be comin' 'round." True enough in a few minutes Fergus Kennedy opened his eyes with a bewildered stare and attempted to sit up, but he dropped back again too weak for the effort.

"We'll make a litter of boughs and get him home all right," Agnes was assured, and very soon the little procession was ready to start back to the settlement, Agnes insisting upon helping to carry a part of the burden.

For many days her father lay in a stupor, and even when roused, he was not able to remember anything of the Indian attack.

"I surmise," said Joseph M'Clean, "that the Indians fired on him, and that the bullet took away a piece of his cap and gave him that wound in the head. He was able to keep up for a while, but after he grew weaker, he crept off into the bushes where we found him."

"I don't see how he escaped the wild animals even if he got away from the Indians," said Agnes.

"Likely he climbed a tree at first and kept in hiding from both beasts and redskins. The wound brought on a fever, and he tried to get to the water and was too weak and ill to move again. That's how I sum it up."

"My father was ever a quiet man, but he is more so now," Agnes told her friends. And, indeed, it seemed hard to arouse him from his lethargy when his wound was actually healed. He would do patiently enough anything that he was told to do, but seemed unable to plan for himself.

"He'll get better after a while," Agnes always said cheerfully, "but I think he'll get well quicker if we go somewhere else. He seems to dread going to the woods, and trembles if you mention the Indians. I don't understand it, for he was always so brave."

"One can't account for the strange ways of a body hurt," said Mrs. M'Clean. "Maybe it would be best that you take him back home."

"We haven't any home," Agnes replied sorrowfully. "You know father had to give up the farm; it was sold after grandfather died, and father had only his share of what it brought. Mother is with her cousin till we make a home out here for her. You know we started to go to a place already cleared and with a good house on it. I wonder if it is very far. It is near the Putnam Colony."

"That is where we are thinking of travelling."

"Then —"

"You could go with us? Indeed and you could. We are going to start before the river is frozen over, and while there is not like to be any danger from the Indians."

Agnes nodded. The plan suited her very well, and she felt that it was happening very fortunately for her.

So in a few days Polly O'Neill, the Fergusons, the McCormicks, and the rest of their friends watched Joseph M'Clean's broadhorn as it started down the river, and there was a great waving of good-bys from the shore. It was not a very merry parting, nevertheless, for it was very uncertain if these who remained would ever again meet those who went.

"It's sorry I am to leave Polly O'Neill," said Jeanie.

"She'll be following us if the Indians trouble them again," Agnes returned.

"She likes to be on the move, does Polly, and doesn't mind lugging about her babies with her wherever she

goes. She'll roll the little baby up in a bearskin, and leave the next older, sucking his thumb, to watch the baby while Polly herself goes off to dance an Irish jig. Oh, but she's a funny Polly."

"She is that, and I am loath to leave her."

"But I was so pleased when father said you were coming with us," said Jeanie, "and some one else was pleased, too."

"Who? Your mother?"

"No, Miss Innocence; it was Archie. I shall like you for a sister, Nancy. Doesn't Archie grow to be a tall fine lad? Eighteen, and six feet tall. He'll not be long finding you a home."

"That's nonsense," Agnes replied sharply. "I've no time to think of such things. I've my father to think of this long while yet, and when my mother comes, I'll not want to leave her for a good bit."

"Ah, but there's no harm in talking of it. Archie has his eye for you and no one else."

"But we are going to another place, and there may be a dozen girls he would like better, so we'll not be talking of it yet, but of some possible lad for you, Jeanie. I'll describe him to you. He's no so tall, for you are of a good height, and of course will not marry a tall man."

"Ah, but I will."

"Hush, just wait till I make my description. He has sandy hair, for your hair and eyes are dark, and

he's a quiet fellow, for you are lively. Now, we shall see. I will point him out to you as soon as I meet him."

"Law, Agnes, you make me feel creepy. One would think you were a witch."

"I'm no witch, then, but I've just common sense. But did you hear how old Mother Martin was treated? The good old soul went to borrow a suppin' of milk from Martha Mackin, and would she let her have it? At last she said, 'I'll give it to you, but I'll not lend it,' and it all but broke Mother Martin's heart to have her say that."

"And why?"

"Don't you know? Why, Martha's baby had fits, and she accused good old Mother Martin of working a spell on the child, because Mother Martin was over there when the spell came on, and you know then Martha tried to put a spell on Mother Martin, and she could only get it off by borrowing something if she had been a witch."

"And was Mother Martin really a witch?"

"No, of course not. No one believed it of her. She is a good old woman, and the minister said it was but spleen and ignorance that made Martha Mackin think so. But it didn't distress Mother Martin any the less."

With such chatter did the girls pass the day as the boat floated down the river. Well wrapped in furs they

kept fairly comfortable, yet they were not sorry when their journey was ended and they started for the new lands, the girls full of talk, but the men silent and watchful. They had little to begin the world with, for their ruined cabins had held most of their belongings, but with an axe and a rifle the frontiersman felt himself sufficiently well equipped to face his future.

The settlement to which they were going was much larger than the one they had left, and there were willing hands to help them, therefore a new log-cabin was not long in being erected. Then came the question to Agnes of what would be best for her and her father. It was hard to arouse him sufficiently to take an active interest in their affairs, and Agnes, too proud to be dependent upon their good friends, at last determined to strike out for herself and discover how matters stood with reference to her grandfather's land. She had mentioned the subject once or twice to Mr. M'Clean, but he had replied, "Plenty of time yet," and the girl felt that she ought not to expect him to leave his own important work to attend to her affairs. The country around was well cleared, and she would herself make inquiries and go to find out about this land. She would make her plans before she told any one. It hurt her that her father should be so indifferent, and yet she was vaguely aware that he could not help it. For this very reason she yearned to get him off to a home of their own, and then send for her mother. Together

they could take the helm and could protect him from any outside criticism till he was well again.

"That's what mother would tell me to do," she told herself. "Father will do anything he is told, but he cannot think for himself, poor father."

It was with this thought on her mind that she made her inquiries concerning her grandfather's farm. It was to old Dod Hunter that she put her questions. He was the earliest settler in the neighborhood, and knew every one. He was always on hand to welcome a new-comer, and was not slow in making the acquaintance of the M'Cleans and the Kennedys.

He was starting for home one day when Agnes waylaid him on the edge of the wood. "I want to talk to you, Mr. Hunter," she said; "can you stop a minute?"

He leaned his rifle against a tree, folded his arms and looked her up and down. "I reckon I kin spare ye a few minutes," he made answer. "What's the talk?"

"Do you know anything about the Muirhead place?"

"Yes, I know it."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"Pretty good; well cleared and has a first-rate house on it."

"Good!"

He looked at her sharply. "What's that to you?"

"It is a great deal to me. I suppose somebody is on the place? It has been kept up?"

"Somebody's there."

"And takes good care of it?"

"Good enough."

"Will you take me there, Mr. Hunter?"

"What for?"

"I have to go."

"I'll take ye if ye hev to go, but my advice is to stay away."

"Oh, but I can't do that. You see father isn't quite — isn't quite himself, and I have to take the lead."

Dod Hunter gave a slow smile. "Yer a big hefty crittur to talk o' takin' the lead. That's for us men folks."

"It would be all right if father were well," Agnes persisted. "Sometimes a woman can do a good deal. At any rate I want to go to the Muirhead place and see what it is like. Is it far from here? Is it near to where you live?"

"It is the next place to me."

"That's good, too. When can I go?"

"Lemme see — I'm comin' this way agin to-morrow, an' I'll start back bright and airly the next mornin'; ye could go then ef ye want."

"How far is it?"

"A matter of twelve mile or so."

"Do you think they will let me stay there — the people, the tenants — till I can get back here?"

"I wouldn't advise ye to try it. Ye'd better come back to my place when ye git through at Muirhead's."

Debby, my wife'll be glad to hev ye. I'll send one o' the boys arter ye. No, ye'd better not conclude to stay at Muirhead's."

"Very well. I can settle my business there in short order, I have no doubt. Thank you, Mr. Hunter."

"I'm plain Dod—er—Uncle Dod ef ye like. I'm no mister."

"Very well, then I will call you Uncle Dod."

"I don't say I hold to young gals travellin' around through the country in a wild-goose fashion, but if ye go with me, I'll guarantee I'll return you safe."

"It isn't a wild-goose fashion. It's for father and mother and the children," returned Agnes, earnestly. "You see—you know father forgets and gets so bewildered, he couldn't do it, and I can. I think it will be all right. I don't see why it shouldn't."

Indeed, to walk up and claim her grandfather's property seemed the easiest matter in the world to the girl in her simplicity. She knew her father held a copy of the deed; he carried it around with him in his clumsy leather pocket-book. She could easily get it, and with that in her possession the rest seemed plain sailing. There was no need to trouble any one to help her. All were busy with their own affairs. The M'Cleans had all they could do to get their own work done, and why ask them to stop to attend to hers? She had a thought of confiding in Archie and getting him

to go with her, but she decided she would better not, since he was needed at home.

So she simply told her friends and her father that she was going home with Dod Hunter and would be back soon.

Jeanie looked at her in surprise. "Why, what do you want to go with him for?" she asked.

"Oh, I want to. He knows all the country hereabouts, and we must look around if we are going to settle here."

"Yes, but why not come in here next to us?"

"Because — oh, I will tell you when I get back."

It was nearly noon the next day before Dod Hunter drew rein before a stout dwelling in the woods. The drive of twelve miles had lengthened to fifteen over roads such as one could scarcely imagine could exist and be travelled upon. Conversation had not been carried on with much spirit, although Agnes had gained from the old man considerable information about the country and the methods of its people. The girl's brightness and quick interest evidently won her a good opinion, for, as they neared the Muirhead place, the grave driver turned to the girl at his side and said: "It ain't none o' my business why you're here, Nancy Kennedy. I've no right to advise ye, but I think ye'd better go back. But if ye do conclude to hang on and matters go hard with ye, I'm not far away. I don't name no names, but there's hard customers for folks

to deal with around here, and it's well ye should know ye hev a friend at hand. If you want to come out as soon as ye get in, I'll be waitin' by this tree."

"You are very good, Uncle Dod," Agnes returned smiling. "You don't give me much encouragement, do you? I think I shall stay till I have finished what I have to say. I am much obliged to you just the same." She clambered down from her place, and went bravely toward the house, it must be confessed with some slight feeling of trepidation. Just what she had to fear, she could not guess, but Dod Hunter had succeeded in arousing a feeling which was the opposite of assurance. For one moment she hesitated and looked back to where the old man was waiting for her, then she shook her head and said, half aloud, "There is nothing in the world to be afraid of!" and on she marched.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNEXPECTED

THE sharp bark of a dog announced the arrival of a stranger. One or two tow-headed children peeped around the corner of the house and then ran away. Agnes stood still for a moment and then knocked peremptorily at the door. One of the children opened it shyly, and Agnes entered. The house held four rooms and a lean-to. The principal room downstairs was utilized as a living-room; from the adjoining apartment came odors of cooking. "Say that Agnes Kennedy is here," said the girl, with a confidence of manner which showed that she did not mean to take a rebuff.

There was a consultation in the back room and presently a tall muscular man entered. "Who might you be, and what do you want?" he asked. There was a resolute, uncompromising expression on his face which would have intimidated a less courageous girl.

"I am Agnes Kennedy, the daughter of the owner of this place. My mother sent a letter to the tenant, — I suppose you are he, — but perhaps you never received

it. I know it is not easy to get letters to such an out-of-the-way place."

The man eyed her sharply. "No letter came for me. Who says you own this place?"

"My mother owns it because it was her father's. I have the deed for it. It was my grandfather's property for years."

"Who was your grandfather?"

"My mother is the only child of Humphrey Muirhead."

"Who is your mother?"

"My mother was Margaret Muirhead of Carlisle; she married my father, Fergus Kennedy. Her father was killed by the Indians. You have a right to ask me all these questions, and I will tell you that after my grandfather died, it was found that he did not leave anything of any account except this place. My mother wrote to some one out here about it, and I thought you were the one. After my grandfather Kennedy died, my mother urged my father to come out here and take this place, and she will come later. He is back in the settlement, but he is not well, and I came to take possession myself in my mother's name. I think we can be very comfortable here," Agnes went on, "though I am sorry the house is not larger," she added, beginning to recognize the unresponsiveness of the man, "but of course you can stay here till you can build another. It will not take long, you know."

The man gave a mocking laugh. "It will take a longer time than you will ever see, my young miss. You will have to travel back the way you came. This place is more mine than yours. Possession is nine points of the law. Here I am and here I mean to stay. You may have the deed, but I've got the place, and it will take more than one slip of a girl to get it from me."

Agnes was speechless with amazement at what she considered the audacity of the man. "You dare to say that?" she cried, recovering her courage. "You have no right to live here at all. It is as much robbery for you to do such a thing as to keep what belongs to another."

The man's face darkened. "Take care," he said. "You'd better be more civil. I'll not be contradicted by a chit of a girl."

"And I'll not be threatened by you," retorted Agnes, all her blood up. "You have not the slightest right here except you were allowed by mother to come. You surely have not been here long enough to claim the place in any such way as that."

"I don't make my claim any such way. You haven't a notion of who I am, I suppose."

"You are the man whom my mother allowed to live here till she should come and take her own."

"I am not the one who is allowed here; I am the one who belongs here, and your grandfather knew it. It

was a foolish move of yours, young woman, to come out here. Better let sleeping dogs lie. Was there nobody to give you better advice?"

"I didn't ask any. I came because father couldn't. We have travelled away out here to get this place that my grandfather left, and we are going to have it."

The man regarded her gloomily. "I don't doubt you're who you say you are," he said at last. "Your mother was your grandfather's only child, I believe you told me. I suppose he always told her that."

"There was no need. She was the first-born, and no sisters nor brothers came to her."

"Your grandfather's papers were looked into, I suppose. There was no will?"

"No; father said no doubt he meant to make one. He had spoken of it several times, but as my mother was the only child, there seemed no need, and father said the law would give everything to mother anyhow, and it was all very plain. Grandfather left some papers in father's hands when he last came to Carlisle, and the deed was among them."

The man smiled grimly. "Well, young woman, I have just this piece of advice to give you. Go back where you came from. You will have to stay here to-night, but to-morrow I'll drive you to Mayo, and you and your father can travel back east the best way you can get there. I don't often give away anything for nothing, but I'm going to give this advice free, and

you'd better take it if you know what is good for you."

"And if I don't take it?"

"Then you'll have to take the consequences, which will not be pleasant."

Agnes shook her head, but stood considering before she spoke again. "There is not a thing to be afraid of," she told herself. "I don't know why this man is trying to scare me, but one thing I do know, and that is that there is no reason why we should give up our rights. I should think my father ought to know what belongs to us and what doesn't." — "Now," turning to the man, "who are you, that you insist upon staying on this place which you know does not belong to you?"

The man drew himself up to his full height. He towered above the girl and looked down at her with an expression of bitter resentment. "My name is Humphrey Muirhead," he said. "I am your grandfather's eldest child."

Agnes started back as this announcement was made, her first feeling being one of sharp indignation. "No, no," she cried, "I cannot believe you."

The man smiled sardonically but gave no reply. "No," continued Agnes, excitedly; "it is not true. You may have fooled your neighbors and have pretended to them that you are a son of Humphrey Muirhead, but I surely should know. Why, I have seen the family Bible with my own eyes and have

read the records — my grandfather's marriage and my mother's birth. It is out of the question for you to be my mother's brother. You are assuming my grandfather's name for the purpose of holding this property. I say you are not Humphrey Muirhead."

"It ain't worth while to get so worked up," said the man, slowly, "and it ain't worth while to call names. I'm no impostor. People around here know that. Ask Dod Hunter; he knew your grandfather; he knew, too, when he came out here, and that he married my mother straight and honest. I am the first-born, not your mother."

Agnes paled before this statement. "No, no," she still protested.

"Yes," emphatically declared the man. "I won't go into particulars; they're not pleasant. Both of 'em are dead now. Anyhow, he was a young fellow, not more than eighteen, and she was the daughter of a backwoodsman, pretty fiery, wouldn't stand being driven, didn't like your grandfather's perticuler ways, and at last she run off and left him. I was a couple of years old then. Your grandfather saw me just once after thet. I found him out, but we didn't hit it off. I've got a temper like my mother's and I did some big talking, so he ordered me out of the house and—" The man paused and clenched his fist, "I'm his son for all that, and I'll have my rights."

Agnes's eyes were fixed on the speaker. She scanned

his countenance slowly, and detected a slight resemblance to her mother about the eyes and brow, though she was reluctant to admit it even to herself. "Show me your proofs," she whispered. "I will believe when I see them."

The man left the room, and the girl stood with bowed head and hands tightly clasped, her whole attitude one of rigid self-control. She remained thus till the man returned and handed her two papers. One was a certificate of marriage between Humphrey Muirhead and Ellen Doyle; the other was a letter in her grandfather's own handwriting and bearing his signature. This letter asked his young wife to return to him with the child.

"Then it wasn't grandfather's fault," exclaimed Agnes.

"That's neither here nor there," the man said, frowning. "I'm who I say I am."

"I see that, but even if you are, the half of this place is my mother's, isn't it? I claim our share of the property." Two bright spots were burning in the girl's cheeks. She was herself again, ready for defiance, for action.

"Your share!" The words broke forth in an angry growl. "Haven't you been living in comfort all these years? Haven't you had my father's money spent on you all? This place is mine. You have had your share, and I will fight for my own."

"So will I," replied the girl. "I shall have to stay here awhile, I suppose, but to-morrow I will go back to my father and my friends, and if there is any justice in the land, I will have it."

"I'm a right pleasant neighbor at times, I am told," returned Humphrey Muirhead, sarcastically. "You'll enjoy having an uncle near at hand. Uncles can be pretty worrisome, you'll find out before you get through."

Agnes made no reply, but thoughts of the tales she had heard of wicked uncles flashed into her mind. She remembered the Babes in the Woods and the little princes in the Tower. It was plain that she had gained nothing by defiance, and she half wished that she had been more conciliatory. After all, it was hard that her grandfather's own son must be her enemy. She looked up half wistfully, but Humphrey Muirhead bent a hard, steely glance upon her. "I mean fight," he said.

Agnes drew herself up haughtily, regretting her softer feeling. "Then we will not talk about it," she made answer. "I shall have to wait here till I am sent for, but I can wait outside."

Humphrey Muirhead stepped to the door and called his wife. "Here, Judy," he said, "this is my niece. You never knew I had one, did ye? Well, I have, and we're terrible fond of each other since we discovered we are related. She's going to stay here till

some one comes for her. You kin give her something to eat." And he left the room.

Agnes stood looking helplessly at the woman before her, a meek, broken-spirited creature. "I am sorry I have to stay," Agnes began. "I didn't understand when I came. I will not trouble you but a little while."

"Oh, 'tain't no trouble," Mrs. Muirhead replied. "I'm real glad to see you. We never had none o' his folks to see us before. He never would talk about them. I guess you favor the Muirheads, for you ain't much like him, an' they say he's his mother over again. Won't you come and set in the other room by the fire?"

Agnes acquiesced silently, and for the next hour she gave herself to the task of entertaining the poor little woman, who did her best to make her guest comfortable, and who evidently was greatly pleased at receiving a visit from so interesting a person.

The children were too shy to be in the way, and Agnes felt too perturbed to do more than try to keep up her conversation with her hostess.

Humphrey Muirhead did not again make his appearance, a consideration which Agnes had not expected would be shown her. "He's in one of his tempers," Mrs. Muirhead told her. "I'm glad enough when he keeps away at such times. Some one from the Hunters' will come over for you, did you say? I can't

see, even if he is mad, why he didn't make you stay here with us. I don't see many women folks," she added wistfully.

Agnes shook her head. "There will be no more visiting, Mrs. Muirhead. I made a mistake in coming at all."

Mrs. Muirhead looked disappointed, but she had long ago given up protests, and took the matter meekly. She stood watching, a dispirited, bent, little figure, as Agnes set out for Dod Hunter's under the protection of the young man who came for her in due course of time.

It was about three miles to this next place, and Dod Hunter appeared at the gate to welcome the girl. "I did not dream I should have such a set-back," began Agnes, "and I didn't think I should have to ask you to take me in. I thought of course I could stay at — at the other place."

"You are more than welcome, my lass," returned Dod, "and I am at your service any time you like."

"Can you spare me a little time now?"

"As well as not." He motioned her to a seat on a fallen log.

"This is good," said Agnes. "I would rather talk out here. I love to be out of doors. This is a beautiful country, and I don't wonder that my grandfather settled here. It is about my grandfather that I want to talk, Uncle Dod. You knew him?"

"So he was your grandfather? Yes, I knew him well. We were good friends when he came out here nigh to forty year ago. If you think it's wild now, what would you have thought it then? You oughter hev seen it, not a path but what the Injuns made, and skeerce a neighbor for twenty mile. Them was real pioneer times. These ain't shucks to 'em, though the folks 'at come out from the east think they're gittin' into the heart of the forest. They're too many comin' to call it wild now."

"I can't imagine it much wilder," said Agnes, "though it is much more settled here than off yonder, where we first went. You knew of my grandfather's first marriage?"

Dod Hunter looked at her askance before he proceeded. "Yes, I knew."

"Tell me, please. Do you know, we never dreamed of such a thing. If mother knew, she never told me."

"She didn't know. He didn't mean she should."

"She always thought she was grandfather's only child. Please tell me all you know about it. I have heard Humphrey Muirhead's story, and I would like to hear yours."

"Well, it was this way. Your grandfather came out here in the airy days, as I told you. Wanted adventure, I suppose. He got it, plenty of it. One day when he was out hunting, he got hurt and was carried to Doyle's. Ellen nursed him. She was a pretty girl,

wild as a hawk, high tempered, independent, and — well, she did about as she pleased always; and she got tired of Humphrey Muirhead after a while — liked her father's home better, and left her husband because it pleased her to. They wa'n't nothing but children, the pair of 'em, at best. He would have taken her back, but she wouldn't go and raised Cain generally. She died when the boy was about five year old. He was well rid of her, and after a year he married your grandmother. Ellen's people kept the boy, but your grandfather supported him and would have done well by him if he'd been let."

"Thank you," said Agnes, softly, when the tale was finished. "It is good to know grandfather was not to blame."

"No, he wa'n't; he was took in. Some folks might think he ought not to have given up the boy, but what's a young fellow with no special home to do with a baby, I'd like to know. Then when he did have a home the grandmother made such a racket that he let her keep him. Besides, it was a long ways off where his folks was, and travellin' in them days wa'n't as easy as it is now, and you can't say it's any too easy gettin' here as it is."

"No, grandfather wasn't to blame," Agnes repeated. "And so this man — Humphrey Muirhead," — Agnes hesitated before she spoke the name, — "he has a right to be where he is, and we can claim only half."

"Humphrey Muirhead's an ugly enemy. If you can get along without any of it, you would do well."

"I don't see how we can. Father is so — so helpless, and I don't see how we can get along without just this. The man Muirhead thinks we have had our share because of all that has been done for mother these years; it hasn't been very much, I am sure."

Dod Hunter wheeled around sharply. "The rascal! He said that, did he? I suppose nothing has been done for him. The reason your grandfather left so little is because a good pile of his money went to help his son out of his scrapes. By rights you ought to have everything."

"Oh, is it that way? I am glad to know about that. Now, Uncle Dod, it will be some time before the business is settled, but I mean to live in this country. I want to learn how best to manage, so we can be comfortable when mother comes, and I want to send for her as soon as possible. I shall ask Mr. M'Clean what he thinks it is best to do, but I do not want to go back now, for we've really nothing to go back to, and there's plenty of land to be had for very little. Couldn't we get a little spot somewhere, and live on that till we can get this Muirhead place settled? I did so hope we could send for mother and the children right away." She gave a little sigh, for it seemed as if this dear hope were now farther away than ever.

Dod Hunter watched her for a moment. She was so

young and, it seemed, so helpless. He shook his head. "I don't think you'd better go anywhere alone with your father. We're not quite as far in the backwoods as we used to be, but it is a pretty hard place, after all, and it needs strong men and strong women. Better go back to your father's kin."

"Oh, no, no; that is not to be thought of. You don't know, but it would never do. Some way can be managed, I think. You need not tell any one, but I'm going to have our share of that place before I get through."

Dod Hunter laughed. "You're spunky, but you don't know Hump Muirhead."

"Oh! if father were only himself, it would be all right. I wish I knew what was to be done."

"First thing you do is to go back to Joe M'Cleane's. He's not going to begrutch ye a place to sleep and a bit to eat. Both you and yer father airn it. Ye work hard, an' we've a right to help each other in this country; if we didn't, some of us would have a poor show." So Agnes agreed to accept this advice and wait for time to bring about some plan for the future. She remained with the Hunters that night, and the next day saw her back again with the M'Cleane's to whom she told her story. But to her father she said nothing. He would be bewildered in trying to puzzle out the facts and could do nothing to help her.

"I think ye'll juist have to let the matter go, Agnes,"

Joseph M'Clean told her. "I'm no so sure but the eldest son doesn't get the estate by right of the law of primogeniture, and there's no use fightin' when it's not necessary. If your grandfather had made a will, leavin' his property to your mother, that would be another thing. Juist let it rest, lass, and bide here till we can think out what is best for ye."

So Agnes submitted, and though she chafed under the long delay, she was very grateful to these good friends who were so anxious for her welfare and that of her father. It was quite true that she earned her board, for she worked with the others and gave a hand wherever there was a need, indoors or out, and her father did likewise, so that the M'Clean clearing soon became a very habitable place.

CHAPTER V

POLLY

BUT it was not long before an event occurred which decided Agnes to make other plans. All through the winter she had been content to stay with her father at the new home of the M'Cleans, but as spring was nearing, the desire was strong upon her to possess the home to which her mother and the children should come. Her father, quiet and indifferent, worked steadily at whatever came to hand; but he rarely spoke, and if asked to give an opinion, looked bewildered and helpless. "Will he always be so?" thought Agnes, "and must we stay on this way month after month?" Then one day appeared Polly O'Neill.

Jeanie and Agnes were busy in the garden getting it ready for the first crop of vegetables, when through the trees which fringed the river they saw some one coming, and a voice called: "Joe M'Clean! Jeanie! Nancy! Are you all there?"

"It sounds like Polly O'Neill," cried Agnes, dropping her hoe. Jeanie followed her example, and the two ran down the little path leading to the river. "It's Polly herself and the children!" cried Agnes.

"Faith, then, it is," came the reply from the approaching figure, who, with a child under each arm and two at her heels, was making her way toward them.

"Why, Polly, Polly, how did you get here?" exclaimed the girls in a breath.

"I kim by the river. I beeta come that way."

"Of course you would have to do that, but where is Jimmy?"

Polly set down her children and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "Faith, thin, I'm a lone woman. Jimmy's been took be the Injuns, and whether I'll see him agin or not, I'll niver tell. The sittlemint's broke up an' ivery mother's son av 'em has scattered, so I followed along an' kem this way with others. I dunno will I iver see Jimmy agin, but I'm not beyant hopin' I will. Annyway, he'll know where to find me, for I left worrud."

"Why, if they are all gone, how could you leave word?"

"I did thin. I got Johnny McCormick to write a bit on a board, an' I planted it where the cabin was, an' if Jimmy comes back, he'll see it."

"Oh, poor Polly! I do hope he will come. But now come right in and see mother," Jeanie urged. "How the baby has grown! It is good to see you all again."

That night the little cabin of the M'Cleane's was full

to overflowing, but these pioneers considered it a part of their duty to give a helping hand to whomever might come along, and there was no limit to their simple hospitality. Yet it seemed to Agnes that now, when the resources of the family were taxed to their utmost, she must seek another home, and she tried to consult her father upon the subject. But he would only mildly acquiesce to anything that she proposed, and therefore to Polly Agnes took her trouble.

"Father is able to work," she told her, "but he seems to have no will, and would as lief do one thing as another. Oh, Polly, what shall I do? If my mother were here, we could take up land and build a little house; the neighbors would help, and soon Sandy would be big enough to take charge of things with our planning, and we could all be so comfortable. But they will not let me go off with him alone."

"Why not jine foorces with Polly O'Neill if ye can stand the children's clatter? I'm no for biding with Joe M'Clean longer than I kin gather me wits."

"Oh, Polly, that would be a fine thing. We could go together, and I could furnish a man's work if not his judgment. Oh, Polly, you have thought of the right thing!"

"Ye see, I'm much in your fix, Nancy, and I've been wonderin' what would I do, an' ye see it'll be doin' a turn for ye all at the same time I'm betterin' mesel'. Now, I'll tell ye what's to be done: ye'll get yer father

to take up a bit of land; ye'll have to go with him to see that he does it all straight an' true, an' we'll build a bit of a cabin and live as commojus as a litter o' pigs."

Agnes laughed. "I'd like to live a little better than that."

"Sure, then, I'm not sayin' we'll not live cleaner."

"And when we get our share of the Muirhead place, you can keep the cabin. Oh, I must tell you all about the Muirheads."

Polly listened attentively to the tale. "Ye'll be havin' a puir chanst av gettin' it," she said, "for the law, I'm thinkin', 'll give it to the son if so be there's no will. Ye'd better put the notion out of yer head, Nancy. We'll stand by one another, an' if my Jimmy comes back, I'll no object to goin' annywhere he may be choosin'."

Agnes thought the chances of Jimmy's coming back were no better than the chances of getting the Muirhead property, but she did not say so, though for all that Polly mourned the loss of her husband, she was outwardly the same fun-loving, jolly creature. She entered into the new scheme with much zest, and pushed it so vigorously that before six weeks were gone, Agnes found herself established in a comfortable little abode on the other side of the river from the Muirhead place, but not very far from the M'Cleans. Every one of the neighbors gave a willing hand to the log-rolling, the house-raising, and the getting of the two families settled.

Fergus Kennedy, in his mild way, seemed to enjoy it all, though the dread of Indians seemed to overpower him now and then, and then he became pitifully dependent upon Polly and Agnes. He worked at whatever task they set him, and as Polly was a master hand at managing, the little clearing soon took on an inhabited look. The children tumbled about on the puncheon floor, the big chimney-place showed a cheerful fire over which pots of various sizes bubbled and steamed, Polly's spinning-wheel whirled in the corner to Agnes's busy tread, and the whole place in an incredibly short space of time gave the appearance of thrift and energy.

Archie M'Clean came over whenever he could spare the time, and Dod Hunter's eldest son, Jerry, admiring Polly's energy and wit, made frequent excuses to drop in to see how they were getting along, to help with the garden, or to bring in a haunch of venison or a wild turkey. Every one recognized the fact that Fergus Kennedy was not an efficient protector, but no one doubted the fact that Polly was. Agnes, auburn haired, blue eyed, fair skinned, was undeniably a girl to be admired by the stalwart young frontiersmen, and when she set out with Polly to any of the rude entertainments the settlement afforded, there was never a lack of an escort. It was a great event when a little log meeting-house was erected by these pious Scotch-Irish, and the going to meeting meant as much to the younger people as to their elders, though perhaps not in quite the same

way. The children, to be sure, rather dreaded the rigid discipline of sitting still through exceedingly long prayers and still longer sermons, but this exercise of self-control was to their advantage, and they liked the psalms, which because of the scarcity of psalm-books were lined out by Joseph M'Clean, who was precentor. The psalms were sung with great heartiness by young and old to the "Twelve common tunes," though singing-masters farther east were beginning to introduce newer ones, thereby causing some dissension.

It was one Saturday afternoon that Archie appeared more spruced up than usual. His hair was sleeked down with bear's oil, and his hunting-shirt was adorned with embroidery done with porcupine quills. Polly saw him coming and laughed. "Faith, but ye beeta look fine, Archie," she cried. "It's no the Sabbath yet, but yer rigged up to the nines, and strut like a turkey-gobbler."

Archie flushed under his sunburn, but he answered Polly's sally with, "It's no so far from the Sabbath Polly, an' ye'd better be catechising the children, so they'll know what's the chief end o' man when the new meenister visits ye."

"Now hear him!" Polly cried. "Is it a meenister himsel' that is spakin'? Land o' love, Nancy, see the solemn countenance av the lad. He's come to tell us that he's off to study for the meenistry, an' that's why he's so prinked out. I'll be gettin' me dye kittle ready,

Archie dear, to color yer blacks fur ye; ye'll soon be needin' 'em."

Agnes came to the door where the two were standing. She was a little flushed from having been over the fire. "You're pranked beyond a doubt, Archie," she said. "What's the occasion?"

Archie looked embarrassed. "It's no occasion, Nancy, except I came over to see you, and ask you to go to church with me to-morrow. Father has a new horse, and I'll take you on the pillion."

Agnes put her head to one side rather shyly, as she glanced at Polly. "There's father," she said. "He loves to go to church, and he will miss me."

"I'll see to your father fast enough, if that's all," Polly answered, "but maybe ye'll not be well dressed enough for this fine gentleman, Nancy."

"Ah, now, Polly," expostulated Archie, "you'd better stop your nonsense. Agnes looks well dressed in whatever she wears."

"In —

'Linsey-woolsey petticoat,
And lappet cotton gown,
Shoes and stockings in her hand,
But barefoot on the ground,'"

sang Polly. "Ye'll not even wet yer good shoes by ridin', Nancy, and I'd advise ye to take the lift when ye ken git it." And so Agnes promised that she would go with Archie, secretly wishing that she had a new ker-

chief and that her best bonnet was of something better than "six hundred" linen.

"Ye'll come in and have a sup with us," said Polly to Archie; "that is, if so fine a body kin set down with our linsey-woolsey, and it's no pewter we have, but juist wooden bowls and trenchers."

"As if I didn't know," returned Archie, with some annoyance. "And that reminds me, I fetched you over a set of bowls I've been making. They are of good ash knots and as hard as a bullet. I left 'em out here where your father is working, Nancy."

"Run along with him and get them," said Polly, giving Agnes a good-natured shove, "and I'll be takin' up the mush whilst ye tell yer father to come in." She stood a moment looking after the youth and the maid as they went off together. With all her rough heartiness and shrewd common sense, Polly was sentimental and she loved Agnes as a younger sister. "They're a likely looking pair," she said to herself. "I hope they'll hit it off, though I'm no so sure o' Nancy. She's far too unconscious-like when Archie's around. He's a good lad, though a bit too serious. Faith, he'd make a good meenister or a schoolmaster if he had the larnin'." She turned into the house while Archie and Agnes went on through the clearing to where Fergus Kennedy was at work in the little garden.

"I saw that Hump Muirhead yesterday," said Archie.

"Where? Did you speak to him?"

"No. He was over by M'Clintock's. He was boasting that you'd never set foot on the place again. He says it's his by right of his being the eldest and the son, and your mother would have no chance at court unless she had a will to produce to prove a claim, and there's nobody can contradict that. I'd like to be able to oust him, but if anybody tried it, he would make it bad for them, for he is capable of doing anything, they say, and nobody can gainsay that he hasn't his right by being the eldest. So I'm afraid you'll have to give it up, Agnes."

"Oh, how I hate to. I know my grandfather would never have told my mother that she would have that piece of property if he hadn't have meant to leave it to her. I should like to get the best of him. Oh, I should."

"So would I, but I think I'd fight shy of him. They say he's a bad one if you get his ill-will, and he will harm you if he can, and it worries me, Agnes — to have you — you in danger."

"Oh, I'm safe enough. I'm not afraid of anybody but the Indians, and they are not so troublesome about here where it is more thickly settled. I like to have you call me Agnes, Archie. 'Most everybody says Nancy."

"I know you like it."

"And that's why you do it? Good boy. Don't say anything to father about Humphrey Muirhead; it will

only confuse him, for he will try to remember, and you know he can't. We'll bide here awhile, anyhow, until — "

"Until I'm twenty-one," interrupted Archie, coolly, "and then I will have a home for you."

Agnes bit her lip; she had not meant to bring up that subject. But she thought it well not to answer, and hurried on to where her father was busy. "Father, supper's ready," she called cheerily. "Time to stop work. Saturday evening, you know, and to-morrow we go to meeting."

"Yes, yes, lass. I'm ready," he returned, straightening himself up. "To-morrow 'll be the Sabbath? I didn't mind that; I'm glad ye told me."

"Here's Archie."

"Archie?"

"Yes, Archie M'Clean, Joseph M'Clean's son."

"Oh, yes; Joe M'Clean's son. Glad to see ye, my lad." It was hard for him to remember Archie from time to time, but the lad never minded and always repeated his answers patiently to the often recurring questions.

"Archie has brought us a nest of bowls," said Agnes. "Where did you put them, Archie?" He produced them from where he had laid them behind a hollow stump, and they were duly admired. A nest of such bowls as Archie could make from knots of the ash tree was something of a possession, and his art in making them gave him quite a name for cleverness, for few had his accomplishment of turning them.

"I've put up a fine sweep at our place," Archie told them, "and you'll be bringing your corn over, won't you, Agnes? All the neighbors are at it, and keep it going steadily, but you shall have your turn, and I will grind all you need."

"How good and kind you are," Agnes returned. "When the corn gets hard, it is pretty heavy work for us. The grater does well enough now while the corn is tender, for you made us such a good one. You remember, father, it was Archie who made our grater, and now he has made a sweep at his father's, and will grind our corn for us if we take it over."

Her father nodded thoughtfully, not being quite sure of himself. He remembered the grater in daily use to prepare the meal for the family, but the maker of the crude little implement was not so familiar an object.

Carrying the bowls and Fergus Kennedy's hoe, Archie strode along by the side of the two, Agnes secretly admiring his fine appearance, though she did not intend to let him know it. He, meanwhile, thought no one could look as pretty as Agnes; her soft auburn hair curled around her neck, and though she was rosy from sunburn and a crop of little freckles freely besprinkled her nose and cheeks, her forehead was purely white, and her throat, too. She carried her sunbonnet in her hand, and her feet, scratched and brown, were minus shoes and stockings. In the cold weather she had her shoepacks and moccasins, but now in the sum-

mer she must go barefooted like the rest of her friends. She was thankful that she was wearing, at the time their first cabin was burned, the only pair of shoes she had brought from home. These were saved for great occasions, and she thought of them with satisfaction, as she remembered that she could wear them to church the next day.

"There is a newcomer in the neighborhood," Archie told them all at the table, between his mouthfuls of mush and milk — "gape and swallow," Polly called it.

"And who is the stranger?" Agnes asked.

"A young man, David Campbell."

"And what is he like? Where has he come from? Where will he settle?"

"Hear the lass's questions," laughed Polly. "Ye'll be takin' them wan be wan, Archie. Firstly, what is he like? Under this head come his features, his hair and eyes —"

Agnes shook her head. "Ah, but Polly, you are almost sacreleegious with your firstly and your heads."

"I? Not a mite. Can no one but a meenister be sayin' firstly and secondly, and so on up to seventhly?"

"Don't bother with her, Archie; go on and tell us. I'm curious to know."

"As if that needed tellin'," continued Polly, bent on teasing.

Archie's grave smile was his only reply to Polly's words, then he went on to say: "He's no so tall, but

broad shouldered; sandy hair and blue eyes he has. He's rather a quiet-spoken man, but energetic, and seeming honest and weel intentioned."

"Ah!" Agnes was suddenly thoughtful. Presently she laughed outright. "Has Jeanie seen him?"

"Yes, he was twice over in the past week. He's thinking of settling down the other side of Gilfillan's."

"Has he a wife to follow him?"

"No; he's but himself."

"Ah!" Polly was disappointed. "Then there'll be no housewarming."

"Not yet. He'll put up a bit of a shanty for shelter and do better later on."

"I'm that anxious to see him," Agnes said. "I've a reason for it. Ah, but, I'll be glad to see Jeanie to-morrow." Her eyes danced and the dimples played around the corners of her mouth as she spoke.

"Tell me what's your consate, dear," said Polly, coaxingly. "Ye've something that's a sacret."

"No, I'll not tell." Agnes shook her head. "You charged me with curiosity, Polly O'Neill, and I'll not satisfy yours. Who's curious now? Come early," she called to Archie, as he started away, "for I want to have a word with Jeanie before we go into the meeting-house, and I want to see this David Campbell."

Archie nodded, though to tell the truth he was a little troubled by Agnes's eagerness to meet the new-comer. Suppose she should fancy him. Archie had

never been jealous before, but it must be said that even the elegance of his attire failed to bring him comfort as he trudged through the woods toward his home.

Even the next morning he had an uneasy feeling that Agnes's excitement on the way to church was not due to her being impressed by the honor of riding with him upon the new horse, but because of David Campbell's appearance in the neighborhood.

"You're overmerry for the Sabbath," he said once, reprovingly, and was sorry a moment after the speech, because it had exactly the effect he feared.

"Then I'll meditate upon my shortcomings the rest of the way," Agnes retorted. "You'll no need to address your remarks to me again, Archie M'Clean. I'll take your meenisterial advice and hold self-communion." And Archie, feeling that he had brought the situation upon himself, was obliged to continue his way in silence, and the slight hold of Agnes's hand around his waist was the sole solace he had. He had counted so much upon this ride, and to have it turn out thus by his own hasty speech was too much. All the bravery of his new garments went for nothing. He longed to apologize, but his stubborn Scotch pride prevented him, and so they rode on in silence till they were in sight of the meeting-house. Then Archie ventured to lay his fingers for one moment upon Agnes's hand, but she withdrew her hold, and he was aware that he had offended in this, too. He turned to look at her, but

the blue eyes were obstinately cast down. Agnes, too, possessed her share of Scotch pride.

They stopped before the cleared space where little groups of people stood. As Archie dismounted he saw that Agnes's eyes were busy in looking over the arrivals. It was evident that there was no forgiveness for him unless he asked it. He raised his eyes to the girl as he lifted her down, but there was nothing but cold disdain in hers. "Ye'll no hold my remark against me," he whispered. "I was vexed for no reason but because ye were so eager to see David Campbell."

"Was that it?" Agnes gave him a smile, for, woman-like, the reason of the offence wiped out the seriousness of the offence itself, and, as she rested her hand lightly on his shoulder while she dismounted, she nodded, "I'll forgive you if you'll point out David Campbell."

"There he is, over by Sam Gilfillan."

"I see him. I hope you enjoyed your ride; I did. I'm going to find Jeanie now."

She was not long in seeking Jeanie out, and she quickly drew her to one side. "I want to show you something, Jeanie. Come over here." She was so dimpling with repressed amusement that Jeanie followed, wondering. "Do you see that man over by the sycamore tree?" she asked. "The one talking to Sam Gilfillan, I mean."

"Yes, I see him. It is David Campbell. How do you come to know him?"

"I don't know him. He's the one, Jeanie."

"The one? What?"

"That you are to marry. Isn't he just as I described?"

"Oh, Agnes!" Jeanie turned scarlet. "You naughty girl."

"Well, then, he is. Not so very tall, sandy hair, blue eyes, quiet. What have you to say?"

"That you are a witch."

"And you'll lend me nothing if I come to borrow."

"I'll lend you anything."

"Except David Campbell; I may want to borrow him sometimes."

Jeanie was about to speak, but just then the minister appeared, and a decorous line of worshippers entered the little meeting-house. What it was that Jeanie meant to say Agnes did not find out; but it was quite true that during the long service Jeanie stole more than one glance at David Campbell.

CHAPTER VI

JEANIE'S SECRET

THE summer would have passed happily enough but for a rumor that there had been seen some hostile Indians in the next settlement ; and this information so affected Fergus Kennedy that he became stricken with a continual fear, and was powerless to do anything but cower, rifle in hand, in the corner of the cabin. Brave man that he had always been, this condition seemed the more pitiful to his friends who had known him in his strength.

"It's not like father," Agnes told Polly, "and I don't know what we shall do. The M'Cleans want us to leave here and go over to them, but who then will look after our clearing?"

"Jerry Hunter 'ud do it."

"Maybe he would, but I don't like to leave here just as we are fairly settled."

"It 'ud be safer ; we're no so near to neighbors, and your fayther so distracted." Polly pinched her chin thoughtfully. "Then there's the childer. I'd shoot

down the redskins, and shed my last drop of blood for 'em; but would it save 'em if the beasts came?"

"Then you think we ought to go to the garrison house?"

"It would be safer. I don't care for mysel', Nancy; but when I think of Jimmy's childer, I can't peril them; for what would he say when he comes back, and finds them gone because of their mother's foolhardiness?"

"But I don't like the fort with the cabins so close together, and the blockhouses so threatening and ugly. I do love the freedom of our own clearing. I don't believe the Indians have an idea of coming here; the settlement is too big, and it is only a rumor that they have been seen in the neighborhood. I think we might wait awhile and enjoy our freedom."

"Land o' mercy, Nancy! I'm no better pleased than you to go; but if there's a chance of our being in danger, we must be on the safe side. I am as daring as the next; but I must say when we beeta have Injuns for visitors, I want to git out."

Therefore Agnes reluctantly packed up the things she most cared for—her favorite wolfskin that Archie had given her in place of the one she had taken such pride in at the first settlement; a little bowl quaintly carved, a belt ornamented with porcupine quills, and such like things. Polly's feather-beds and the rest of the family necessities were packed on two horses, and the children were established in crates at the sides of

these beasts of burden; and so the journey was taken to the fort, now the centre of quite a large, though scattered, community.

Several families, at the report of Indians near, had come into the fort, but there was still a number of the clearings occupied by those who did not easily take alarm, and who waited for a confirmation of the news before they should leave their comfortable quarters.

Jeanie insisted that Agnes should come immediately to her, but Agnes refused to leave her father altogether, though she spent many a day at the M'Cleans' clearing, and there made the acquaintance of David Campbell, who, being a near neighbor, found it convenient to drop in often, despite the fact that Jeanie obstinately declared that she did not like him.

"He is a good fellow," Agnes insisted, "and I don't see why you don't like him. You must and shall," which was a sure way of encouraging Jeanie in her decision not to like him.

"It is a pity Archie is your brother, for then you could take him and give me David," said Agnes, one day, when Jeanie had been singing Archie's praises.

"You can have David for aught I care," returned Jeanie, bridling.

"Do you say so? Well then, I'll go with him to meeting next Sabbath day."

"You'd better wait till he asks you," retorted Jeanie.

"Oh, he'll ask me fast enough," Agnes replied, nodding her head with an air of conviction.

Jeanie bit her lip but said nothing. David had asked her and she had refused. Like most girls she was in a contrary frame of mind when it came to a question of meeting a lover halfway. In her secret heart she was only too anxious to accept David's company, but she would not have Agnes know it for the world, and though Agnes made many sly references to the pleasures to be expected upon the coming Sabbath, neither girl was particularly jubilant when she considered it, though of the two Agnes was the more pleased. She had noted Jeanie's lofty expression, and laughed in her sleeve at the success of her little plot.

Not only one but two rather disconsolate members of the M'Clean family appeared at church the next Sabbath day. Not relenting in her determination to tease Jeanie, as well as to punish Archie for a fit of sulks he had had during the week, Agnes triumphantly had her way and led David to offer his escort. What did she care if heretofore he had seemed to have eyes and ears only for Jeanie? She would let Jeanie see that there were other girls beside herself, and it would also raise Archie's estimation of her if he knew that she could walk off so easily with another girl's lover, so she argued. Very adroitly she made Jeanie the main topic of conversation, so that David was entertained greatly, and the two were chatting like old friends when Jeanie

and Archie passed them on the road. David was always rather silent in Jeanie's company, and she felt a jealous pang as she noticed how ready he seemed to talk to Agnes. She gave the two a stiff little nod as she passed, and Agnes smiled to herself. "It's all for her own good," she thought, "and I am glad I could make her put on that top-loftical look. As for Archie, he looks sour enough, but I don't care." She had learned some of Polly's saucy ways, and the toss of her head was Polly's own. Yet when Mrs. M'Clean urged her and David to come home with her to supper, the girl was nothing loath, and indeed was mischievously curious to see how Jeanie would treat her, and to carry further her harmless little flirtation with David.

The M'Cleans had made of their clearing one of the most comfortable places thereabouts. Both father and son had a genius for the mechanic arts, so that they were well supplied with hominy blocks, hand-mills, tanning vats, looms, and such affairs, all of their own manufacture, and though rude and clumsy, these were well adapted to their needs. The house was more commodious than at first, having besides its living room, a bedroom on the first floor and a lean-to, or kitchen. A loft overhead gave two or three sleeping rooms. The building, floored with smooth puncheons, and, being well roofed and chinked, was very comfortable. Archie's latest achievement, a milk bucket having staves alternately red and white, Jeanie displayed

with great pride, and though Agnes really thought it beautiful, she declared that it was too gaudy.

At table a discussion of the day's services was considered proper and fit, the sermon being the chief topic of conversation. Joseph M'Clean was still a strict Presbyterian, and did not uphold the lapses from a serious deportment into which so many of the pioneers had fallen. He was bound that his own family should be "releegious and orderly on the Sabbath, no matter what his neighbors did," and so the Sabbath evening was passed soberly in singing psalms, and in reading from the Bible, and in discussing at great length the chapters read. Archie quite warmed up to the debate, but David had little to say, putting in only a word now and then, his eyes between times upon Jeanie, who had treated him with a cold scorn all day.

It was when the two girls went up to their loft room to prepare for bed that Jeanie had her say. She, too, had been very quiet, for Agnes had lured David over to her side upon the settle, and had ignored Archie entirely.

"I think you treat Archie too badly," said Jeanie, shaking down her dark locks of hair.

"Oh, no, you mean I treat David too well," returned Agnes, saucily.

"What do I care how you treat David?"

"You care a great deal; confess that you do, and I'll not treat him so well."

"I'll not confess."

"Very well, you shall be tortured till you do."

"You are a heartless girl, Nancy Kennedy."

"Indeed, then, I'm not; I am too soft hearted."

"Then why do you turn a cold shoulder to poor Archie?"

"'I'm ower young to marry,' and Archie does try one with his talk of what he means to do when he is twenty-one."

"Just think what fine buckets and bowls he could make you, Nancy. There would be no one anywhere about who could make such a display as you."

"As if I'd trade my heart for a red and white bucket; I'm not an Indian squaw to be bought with trinkets."

"And Archie doesn't think so. It was only I who said that. Archie is very modest."

"He's well aware of his own good traits. He will make a good meenister, and I'm no one to hanker after being a meenister's wife."

"You ought to feel honored if ever you are."

"Maybe, but I think, as I said before, I am ower young." She put on an innocent, childlike expression, and gave a side glance at Jeanie. "David can make fine bowls, too, and he is to make me one, and, moreover, he is going to tan a famous bearskin for me." She gave her information carelessly and laughed at the "Oh!" that it extracted from Jeanie. "You must learn

from the Indians not to make a sound when you're being tortured," she said calmly. "I'll tell you something else, and see if you can't do better. David's mare goes beautifully, and I am to try her some day. He will borrow another, and we are going to — to —" She peeped around at Jeanie who had averted her head and whose face was buried in her hands.

"You didn't make a sound," Agnes went on, trying to unclasp her friend's closely locked fingers. "You are getting on famously." She laughed softly as she finally pulled away the resisting hands from Jeanie's face. "Do you hate me, Jeanie?"

"No," came reluctantly.

"Because it's wicked to hate people, or because it is I, and you can't help loving me even if I do tease you?"

Jeanie made no answer.

"Will you confess? Will you say that you like David better than any one in the whole wide world?"

Jeanie shook her head decidedly.

"Peggy Wilson said that David was a fine lad, and I was in luck to get ahead of you."

Jeanie never stirred.

"And Phil Beatty came up when we were going to mount to ride home, and he said, 'When you give your housewarming, Dave, count on me; you'll be wanting some one to help you if you're going to add to your house soon,' and David laughed; and when he put me

on the horse, I vow he squeezed my hand. I think I like David very much, and as long as you don't care for him — why — there would be nothing wrong in liking him, would there? Now if I had tried to attract him behind your back and without learning whether you wanted him or not, that would be another thing, and it would be too dishonorable to think of, but as it is — let me see — he is twenty and I am now sixteen; in another year I might like him well enough. Do we look well together, Jeanie? I ask only on my own account, since you don't admire David. David — it is a nice name, isn't it? Mrs. David Campbell, I wonder how I should like to be known as that."

Jeanie sprang to her feet, and flung Agnes's hand from her. "You are a mean, aggravating girl. I don't love you, if you want to know. I wish I had never seen you." And she burst into tears.

"Now, haven't I gone and done it!" exclaimed Agnes. "But still—now don't cry, Jeanie—still if you don't care for David, why can't you let me have him?"

"I do care," sobbed Jeanie, "if that satisfies you—if you like to be a fiendish Indian and torture my secrets out of me."

"Was it a secret?"

"You know it was. You know you had no right to tease it out of me when I didn't want to tell it. You know it was cruel."

"I didn't know. I forgot you might want to keep it

even from me, and that I hadn't any right to make you tell me. I forgot everything except that I was bound to make you acknowledge that I had prophesied truly. I did that," she added, half in triumph, though she was really much subdued. She went close to Jeanie, and attempted to put her arm around her friend, but Jeanie pushed her away. Agnes grew more penitent as she realized how deeply she had offended, and she stood the picture of contrition. "I'm so sorry, Jeanie," she said, after a pause in which only Jeanie's sobs could be heard. "I'll never, never tell any one. I will not, truly. I see now I was very wicked to tease you so, but I know David likes you better than anybody, and — please be friends and I'll tell you why he seemed to like being with me — I talked about you all the time."

At this Jeanie raised her head. "Are you telling me the truth, Nancy?"

"Of course I am. You shouldn't say that even if I have teased you. You know I always tell the truth."

"How came you to think of that — of talking about me?"

"Because —" It was Agnes's turn to hang her head. "You said once when you wanted to please Archie and get him to do anything for you that you had but to talk of me."

"Then — now tell me the truth, since you know my secret — do you like Archie?"

"Yes — I like him, but I do not like to think of

marrying any one. I will not think of it till I see my mother again."

"But we are as old as our mothers were when they were married."

"Yes, and older than Polly, who was but fifteen, and is now only twenty-four. But I want to wait, so don't fash me about it, Jeanie, till my mother comes. I am in no haste."

"No more am I, though I — I —"

"Yes, I know ; you — you — will wait for David, and you will not have long to wait if you but give him half a chance."

At this Jeanie put her arms around Agnes and peace was concluded, Agnes feeling that though she had gained her point, it was at the sorry cost of a bit of her own self-respect, and she felt ashamed at having pressed Jeanie so hard as to make her give up the secret which was her own dear girlish dream. She determined at once that she would do all that she could to make matters easy for the pair, and that they should never have reason to reproach her for a lack of friendship.

The Indian alarm came to nothing, yet because of her father Agnes was glad to stay at the fort all summer, though she longed for the little cabin and for the time when her mother should come. How long it seemed since she left her old home and started forth to this new Ohio country. It had been a month or more since she had been down to the little clearing

to which she and Polly hoped soon to return, for now the cold weather would soon set in and the danger from Indians would be over. Archie, who had ridden by frequently, reported all in good order, and they concluded that Jerry Hunter must be there, as Archie had seen smoke coming from the chimney on more than one occasion. "I didn't go in," he told Agnes, "for it seemed all in first-rate condition."

"That's good to know," Agnes returned. "I dreaded to see it looking dilapidated, and, besides, —" she hesitated, "I didn't know but that Humphrey Muirhead might have tried to do some damage to the place, knowing we were away."

"I don't know that he does know it; he has been keeping pretty quiet lately. I suppose he feels safe, and knows that you will not trouble him again."

"I wish I could."

Archie smiled. "It would only be worse for you if you did. Faith, Agnes, in this country where there's land enough, and to spare, why do you hanker after Naboth's vineyard?"

"If it were Naboth's vineyard, I wouldn't hanker, for I'd have no right to, but I feel, and always shall feel, that grandfather intended my mother to have that place. It is the best about here. He put time and money in it, and the house is such a good roomy one, while the farm is cleared far more than most of the others, and one could make a good living from it. If

we could have the place all so well cleared, with the truck patch and the orchard and all that, we could send for mother at once. But now that father cannot work as heartily as he once did, it will be years before we can hope to have as good a place as that."

"I should have your mother come, anyhow, if I were you."

"Oh, I mean to have her come as soon as there is a chance for her to find company this far. I have sent her word. Our little cabin is small, to be sure, and with two families in it we shall be crowded, but we are going to add a lean-to, and I don't doubt but that we can get along after a fashion."

"I wish you would remember that I shall soon be ready to take one member of the family away to another home," said Archie, pointedly. Agnes, for answer, gave a shrug of her shoulders and walked away. She did not care to bring up that question.

It was a crisp, clear morning—the last of November—when the family returned to the cabin. There were evidences to be seen of a man's presence when they entered the door. A pipe lay on the table, a pair of shoepacks on the floor, a book, half open, had been tossed on the settle. Agnes took in all these details. "Jerry is still here," she remarked, "but I didn't know he ever touched a book."

"Never mind the book, or what he touches," said Polly; "we've got to stir our stumps and get these

things of ours where they belong. Where's your father?"

"He's gone out to the truck patch."

"So much the better. We shan't need him till meal-time. By then Jerry will be back, I'm thinking. Trust the men for bein' on hand when the vittles is on the table."

But it was not till they were snugly settled in bed that night that they heard the sound of some one at the door which Agnes had securely bolted. She gave Polly a gentle shake and whispered, "There's some one at the door, Polly; I expect it's Jerry."

"Whist!" said Polly. "Don't wake your fayther, though he do sleep that heavy you could fire off a gun in the room and it wouldn't stir him. I'll go to the door and ask who it is." She suited the action to the word and put the question, "Is it yersel', Jerry?"

"No," was the reply in an unfamiliar voice. "Who are you, and what are you doing in my house?"

Polly drew back. "The man's stark, starin' mad!" she exclaimed. "What's he doin' wanderin' about without a kaper?"

"Don't let him in! Don't let him in!" cried Agnes. "See that the window's shut, Polly, do."

But Polly's curiosity got the best of her, and she went to the window to peer out. The man was fumbling at the door, trying to get it unfastened. Failing in this he went toward the window. Polly

quickly slammed to the wooden shutter, at the same time crying out, "Get out of here wid ye, and do it quick."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," came the reply. "This is my house, and naturally I should like to get into it."

Polly opened the shutter a crack. "Who says it is your house?" she asked.

"I've been living here for a month, and it's mine by good right. The people who used to live here have gone back east, as perhaps you know, and as I came here before you did, I have the best right to the place. First come, first served, you know. If you don't let me in by the door, I will have to climb in by one of the windows. Where's your husband? Perhaps he'll listen to reason."

"It's mesel' who'd be glad to know where he is," returned Polly, seriously, "and I'd be glad if you'd tell me."

The man gave a little chuckle.

Agnes by this time had drawn near to Polly and was listening.

"I don't believe he's crazy, Polly," she whispered; "he's only impudent. Shall I call father?"

"No, I'll manage him," returned Polly, coolly. "Let him try to get in wanst, an' I'll make it hot for him. If he's not a crazy man nor an Injun, I'm not afraid to tackle him."

The man was now occupied in wresting the leathern

hinges of the shutters from their fastenings, and seemed likely to succeed. It would be easy enough then to cut through the piece of linen which, smeared with bear's oil, served in lieu of window-glass.

"You stop right there," cried Polly, "or I'll give you a taste of shot. The best thing for you is to mount yer hoss, or if you haven't one, to go foot-back if you like to where you came from, for go you shall, or you'll be sorry."

There was no answer but the bang of the shutter as it fell from its hinges. Polly's temper was up, and without further ado she snatched up her rifle from its accustomed corner. There was a flash, a report, a heavy fall, and Polly backed away from the window, while Agnes sank to the floor covering her face with her hands.

CHAPTER VII

THE INTRUDER

IT was some weeks later that the gaunt form of a young man might have been seen stretched on the bed in one of the loft rooms. The place was very still. Upon the homespun curtains at the small window the flickering play of light and shade showed forth the drawing of a pine tree's branches. An array of bowls and cups stood upon a small table and the small room bore the appearance of having been used for some time by one used to nursing a very ill patient.

Presently the young man opened his eyes wearily and looked around the room. He was very white and wan. His dark hair, which had been cropped close, was beginning to grow out in little wavy locks about his forehead. He lifted his hand feebly, and looked at its transparent thinness. "Where am I?" he asked weakly.

At his words Polly came forward and observed him closely. "Praise God, yer yersel' again!" she exclaimed. "Now don't say a word, me lad. Drink this, and go to sleep."

The young man gazed at her wonderingly, but he obeyed so far as to drink from the cup which she held to his lips. "I don't want to go to sleep. I want to know where I am," he persisted. "It looks natural and yet it doesn't."

Polly set down her cup and smiled, the young man regarding her silently but with evident surprise. He took in every detail of her rough dress; he noted the thick hair which swept back in pretty curves from the low forehead, the steady gray eyes with their long dark lashes, the firm red lips. He closed his eyes, but opened them again, almost immediately. "You're still here," he said; "I thought you were a dream."

Polly smiled again. "I'm a purty substantial dream. Do you feel better?"

"Yes, I suppose so; only I don't know what has been the matter. Where am I? What has happened?"

Polly shook her head. "Don't try to remember. You are here in good hands. All you have to do is to obey orders and try to get well and strong."

"I begin to remember." The patient spoke slowly as if recalling, gradually, certain events. "I came home and couldn't get in; then somebody fired at me." He looked at Polly inquiringly, and the blood mounted to the very roots of her hair.

"Yes, but you must wait till you are stronger to hear all about it," she told him. "We do not know your name, and you do not know us. I am Polly O'Neill;

that's enough for you to know at one time. We'll talk about the hows and whys later."

She left the room and went downstairs where she at once sought out Agnes, beckoning to her with a look of mystery. "He's got his mind again," she said. "Now, what's to be done? Do you suppose he'll be telling it around that Polly O'Neill made a target of him?"

"Of course not. When we explain that he was breaking into our house, he will be glad enough to keep quiet about it; and if he does not, I think we shall have our own story to tell, and it will be believed." Agnes gave her head a toss and Polly laughed.

"Very well, then," said the latter, "since you are so high an' mighty about it, suppose you go up with this dish of porridge an' see what he has to say for himself."

"Ah, but, Polly —"

"No ah buts; go right along," and Polly gave her a good-humored push toward the table where the bowl of porridge stood.

"He's a young man," said Agnes, still hesitating.

"Yes, and good looking and nice spoken. He'll not bite you," returned Polly, blandly. "Go along with your porridge before it gets cold; and if he wants to talk, let him."

Agnes, with bowl in hand, slowly mounted the stairs to the loft. On Polly's best feather-bed, covered warmly with skins, lay the wounded man. His eyes were closed, but, at the sound of Agnes's gentle voice, he opened

them. "Here is some porridge for you," the girl said.

"Thank you, but I don't care for it."

"You must take it. Polly says so. She is the best nurse in the world."

The young man smiled. "Well, if Polly says so, I suppose that settles it. Will you bring it close, and may I ask you to raise my head a little?"

Agnes pushed the pillow further under his shoulders and raised his head, holding the bowl while he drank his gruel.

"I'd like to sit up a little. I want to look out," said the young man.

Agnes made a roll of some skins which she brought from the next room, and by their aid he was propped up; then she drew aside the curtain from the little window and stood waiting.

"It is good to see the outside world again," he said. "It is familiar enough. I think it is time for explanations. Will you tell me how I came to be here, and why you are here, and who you all are? I've had glimpses of the reality of it all, though I suppose my mind has been wandering a bit, too. How long have I been in this bed?"

"Nearly three weeks."

The young man gave an exclamation of surprise, and then, with a gentle wave of his hand, he said, "Don't stand." Agnes drew up a low stool. She was not very used to courtly ways and they embarrassed her, so she



SHE DREW ASIDE THE CURTAIN FROM THE LITTLE WINDOW.

sat looking down at her brown hands folded on her lap, and wished she could think of some excuse to take her downstairs.

For some time there was silence, the girl feeling conscious that she was being steadfastly regarded by a pair of big brown eyes.

"I remember now," the young man broke the silence by saying. "I have seen you before, and that good woman you speak of as Polly called you Nancy. That is one of the things I remember. I don't know what came next, for I drifted off into that dreamy world I have been in for so long."

"Yes, almost every one calls me Nancy, but my name is Agnes, Agnes Kennedy."

"It is a pretty name. Mine is Parker Willett. The boys call me Park. Now will you tell me how long you have lived here and something about yourself?"

"We came from near Carlisle, Pennsylvania. My father had to give up our old home, and we came out here together more than a year, nearly two years, ago. We lived for a time in another settlement, but it was raided by the Indians and most of the houses were burned. My father was badly hurt at the same time, and he has never been the same since. Some of our good friends were coming this way, and my mother's father some years ago settled not very far from Marietta. He left some property that we thought belonged to my mother, so we were going right there, but some one else

claims it. Then Polly came, and we took up this land and built this little cabin; but when summer came, we were afraid of the Indians, and went back to the fort. We stayed there till we thought it would be safe to come back here, and so we came."

"And found your home had been occupied?"

"Yes, but we thought it was Jerry Hunter who had been here. He said he would come and look after things once in a while."

"It was I, you see."

"Yes. What did you do it for? It wasn't right to try to steal the home from other people."

"No, it wasn't; but you see I didn't know I was stealing. I feel very much mortified that I should have persisted in getting in. It was this way: a man named Muirhead, over across the river, told me that if I were looking for a good place to settle that I could find it here, for there were some persons who had come from Pennsylvania and had put up a cabin and had begun to clear up, but they had given up the place and had gone back home, and I could have the place for the taking. I came over here and explored, and found it just as he said — the house shut up, and things pretty well cleared out, so I took possession." He paused. "I was misled, because he said it was a man and his daughter, a young slip of a girl who couldn't stand the rough country."

"You say Muirhead was the name?"

"Yes."

Agnes gave her head a defiant shake. "We might have known it," she said.

"He told me further that he was in a position to know, because the people were relatives of his, and he had a half-interest in the place, but that there was plenty of land nearer home, and he'd not stand at that. I wondered a little, but it seemed all right, as he appeared to know all about it, and referred me to some persons who said he was all right and that he had lived here all his life. I thought myself lucky to get a place where there was already a house built, and did not inquire further. I expected to stay till I should find a piece of land I wanted to buy, and I would have paid Muirhead rent."

Agnes was silent for a little while, then she said, "Then this Muirhead is not a friend of yours?"

"No, an acquaintance merely. I was directed to him by some one who said he knew all about the country, having been born and brought up near by."

"So he was. He is my mother's half-brother, and I think he would do anything to injure us. Every one says he has a right to the property on which he is living, but I don't think so. He certainly ought not to have more than half, yet he takes it all, and I know my grandfather would have given my mother a share of whatever he had. But there is no use trying to fight it. I am only a girl, and father is not in a state to help, so

there is no one to do anything about it, but I feel sure that Humphrey Muirhead is trying to get us from the neighborhood, and he'll do everything against us, and that is why he sent you here."

"I see," said Parker Willett, smiling, "though I think it was decidedly against me, too, as it turned out."

"It was too bad that you should have suffered by his wickedness, though I didn't mean that exactly as it sounded."

"I know that. It is really the result of my own folly. I ought to have made further investigation, and I ought to have been less determined to get in. I lost my temper, and Polly, you know — her voice is not reassuring."

Agnes laughed. "Dear Polly! her voice does go through one sometimes."

"So does her shot," returned Parker, with a wry face.

"She feels very sorry," said Agnes, "though she says you brought it on yourself."

"So I did. I acknowledge that."

"She is a good shot, and it is a mercy you were not killed. Now don't you think you'd better lie down again?"

It was quite evident that the patient was ready for a change of position, and Agnes, having made him comfortable, went down to Polly full of the information that had just been given her.

Polly listened attentively to what Agnes had to tell her. "I'd like to have Hump Muirhead on the end of

this fork," she said, brandishing her flesh fork in her hand. "I'd roast him over the coals, would I."

"Oh, Polly, you're as bad as the Indians."

"Am I then? I am not. But a bad man needs a gridiron and brimstone; he'll get it yet."

"Oh, Polly!" Agnes's shocked voice exclaimed again.

"Never you mind," Polly went on; "he'll get his deserts yet." She sat for some time nursing her knees before the fire and then she burst out with: "I'm thinking, Nancy, that it 'ud be no so bad a thing to keep that young man with us when he gets well, and bechune us we may be able to trick that Muirhead yet."

"But, Polly, we don't know anything about him, and how can we tell that he is a good man, or that we'd like to have a perfect stranger to come right into the family?"

"Now isn't that like a cautious Scot?" said Polly. "I suppose ye'd be wantin' his character from his meenister, and another from his townfolks before ye'd give him the hand o' friendship. He's from Virginny, I kin tell by his trick of speakin', and he's a gentleman."

"I think he is a gentleman," said Agnes, thoughtfully, "for he is much more polite than the lads about here."

"He's new to the place; he'll forgit it, give him time," said Polly, complacently. "I'll not be long in findin' out whether he's worth the keepin' or no." And in

truth she laid her plans so well that by the time the winter was over, Parker Willett had become a member of the household. All his chivalric spirit was roused for the brave Polly, though she had been the cause of his long weeks of pain and weakness, and at first he felt inclined to resent any advances on Polly's part. But her unfailing good humor and kindness, and the hopeful spirit which bade her never give up looking for her missing husband, won his heart. Then, too, he felt a strange pity for Agnes, the young and helpless girl, so tender and devoted to her gentle father. Wild as a hawk was Agnes growing under Polly's independent example, yet she was always womanly, sweet, and tender where her father was concerned. She might ride bareback on a wild young colt; she might go forth like a young Amazon, pistol in belt and knife in hand, but she would come back, fling herself from her horse, and sit down by her father gentle as a little child, trying to entertain him by talking of the dear old times.

"Agnes is a good little girl," Mr. Kennedy would say. And Parker, who an hour before had seen this same Agnes stamping her foot at Polly, and in a rage at Jerry Hunter because he failed to do something she had requested, would smile to himself. "Poor little lass, she needs her mother," was what Fergus Kennedy would say if Agnes were caught in one of her rages. "Where is your mother?" he would ask her wistfully.

Then would Agnes fly to him all gentleness, the fire

dying out of her eyes, and her voice as soft as a dove's. "She's comin' father, dear," she would tell him. "You know we have sent for her, and she will come very, very soon. And Sandy and Margret and Jock and Jessie, — you remember, father, — they'll all be coming along before long." Then she would look at Parker, as if to say, "Don't you dare to contradict." And the young man would not for the world have borne her a moment's ill-will, though he might have been thinking her a little hypocrite and a lawless young creature who should be well lectured. As time went on they had many tiffs, for Parker loved to tease, and Agnes would brook no contradictions from any one but her father. Indeed, Jeanie M'Clean said she was no more like the lass she used to be back there at home, so gentle, so well behaved, and she did not see what had come over her.

"It's all Polly O'Neill's doings," she declared to Archie, but Archie frowned and said Agnes was well enough, and that she had a right to say what she liked.

This was after a visit which Jeanie made one day to Agnes, coming upon her in a heated altercation with Parker. "I only wish Polly had hurt you worse than she did," snapped the girl. "You shall not tease me. I will not stand it. I will let the chickens out when I want to."

"But they play havoc in the garden and eat up the grain, too."

"Plant more, then. Father does when I tell him."

"You are unreasonable, Agnes."

"Don't call me Agnes. I am Miss Kennedy, if you please."

"Miss Kennedy, then. You are unreasonable, for your fowls can be fed as well in their own enclosure as to be eating up the food we shall need for ourselves."

"As if they could eat it all up."

"They do not eat it all up, of course, and you know they do not have to be kept up all the year; they are free to roam where they will after the things have grown more, but we do not want them to destroy the seeds we have planted with so much care."

"I don't care; you shall not call me unreasonable."

"Oh, Agnes!" Here Jeanie's voice broke in. She had ridden over with David. "What does make you in such a temper?"

"This creature." Agnes gave a magnificent wave of her hand to Parker Willett, who flashed an amused smile at Jeanie.

"Don't mind her, Mr. Willett," said Jeanie, as he helped her down from her horse. "She is a naughty girl at times."

"Her father says she is a good little girl," said Parker, teasingly, and Agnes bent an ominous look upon him.

"I'll pay you up for that," she said.

The young man smiled gravely. To his twenty-five years Agnes seemed still a little child, and he agreed with her father that the girl needed her mother. "Polly O'Neill, good, clever, kind hearted though she might be, was no guardian for a young lass," he said to himself. "The girl has been well brought up, but she will forget all her gentle ways in Polly's company. I wish it could be managed to alter conditions for her. I've no right to interfere, but if she were my sister—" He struck his spade sharply into the earth, and then stood erect looking after Agnes as she disappeared into the cabin with Jeanie. At the other end of the truck patch he caught sight of Fergus Kennedy, his face wearing its usual mild, dazed expression. Parker had a genuine affection for his coworker, and he watched him now with a look of pity and concern. "Dear old fellow," he murmured under his breath, "for your sake if not for the girl's own I will do my best." And from that time he took a greater interest in Agnes, in spite of the fact that she played many tricks upon him, and more than once angered him beyond endurance. Then he discussed the situation with Polly.

"That little girl is getting to be as wild as a hawk," he ventured to say. "Do you think her mother would like to see her so?"

Polly gave her head a toss. "Why shouldn't she be wild? It suits the country. She'll not be like to wear silks and satins and be mincing about on high heels.

She'll be like to marry a settler lad — Archie M'Clean, no doubt."

"But Archie is not so rough; he is quite serious and gentle."

"All the more he'll like the bright ways of the lassie. She's young yet, Mr. Willett, an' young things must have their fling. Leave her alone for a while, and she'll sober down like the rest of us." She gave a little chirrup of a laugh and glanced at the young man, who laughed in return.

"You have sobered down so entirely, Polly," he said.

"Ye didn't know me when I was a bit of a lass," replied Polly, with a sly look.

"That is true; you must have been —" He shook his head, and Polly laughed again.

Society upon the frontier was decidedly mixed, and to Polly one was as good as another. She rather admired the handsome, courtly young Virginian, but she gave quite as much favor to rough, awkward Jerry Hunter, and, indeed, preferred his boisterous laugh and clumsy jokes to the more quiet conversation of Parker Willett.

As for Agnes, she accepted the fact of the young man's presence with cheerfulness, except when her ire was raised by his teasing, and then she plied Polly with requests to send him off, but an hour later she would calm down and confess that it was a good arrangement all around, and that his clear head and busy hands would be greatly missed if he should leave them. As

time went on that ever present thought, "When mother comes," took more and more possession of her, and colored all her plans for the future. She did not talk of these plans to Polly, but when she and her father were alone, she would let her thoughts run riot, and at these times, too, it seemed that Fergus Kennedy was more like his old self than outsiders believed he could ever be.

With Jeanie Agnes was now on good terms, for Jeanie, once she had confessed her interest in David, made Agnes her *confidante*, and though David was shy and Jeanie coy, the affair was visibly progressing, and Agnes thought it probable that in a year or so there would be another home started in the settlement.

Archie of late was more serious than ever, and one day he propounded a question to Agnes which rather puzzled her. "Would ye like to marry a man who'd make ye a home back there in the east, Agnes?" he asked.

"And go back there with father? I don't know, Archie. But there's no such to marry me, and then there will be mother and the children."

Archie nodded. "It's a muckle one would have to do with such a family," he said half to himself and with a sigh. "If he happened to be a puir meenister, it would be hard making out, though maybe — with a farm —"

"What are you talking about, Archie?" Agnes interrupted impatiently. "I never heard such maundering

talk. Who's a puir meenister, and what are you trying to say?"

Archie roused himself from his revery. "Oh, nothing, Agnes; I was but thinking."

"You're forever and the day thinking, and what comes of it?"

"Something may," he replied. "Ye'd sober down then," he said, looking at her speculatively.

"I can't think what you mean. I'll sober down for no one, unless it be my mother," she added softly.

"Ah, your mother, yes." And again Archie was plunged in thought so that Agnes flung herself off and declared to Jeanie that Archie was going daft.

CHAPTER VIII

ARCHIE'S PLAN

AGNES was right in charging Archie with doing a deal of thinking, for, ever since the meeting-house had become an assured fact, his yearning for the ministry had increased, and he thought of it day and night. In vain did he tell himself that his father needed him; in vain did he call himself unfit, that tugging at his heartstrings would not cease, and at last the lad took his trouble to the minister himself. "It is a call, lad," said the good man, after he had heard Archie's hesitating account of himself. "If there's a way open to you, take it, for the laborers are few."

"There'd be a way open if my grandfather knew," said Archie, slowly. "He's been aye ready to urge me to the step since I was a bit of a lad, and he would help me."

"Then go and ask your father's blessing and start forth, and may the Lord of Hosts go with you."

Archie went home with so serious a face that his father noticed it as the boy came into the workshop and stood before him.

"What fashes ye, lad?" he asked. "Are ye in trouble?"

"No trouble now, father. I've been to see the meenister."

"Ay, and what then?"

"He thinks I have a call. I've felt it this long while, and—father, shall I go?"

Joseph M'Clean was silent for a moment. Archie was the apple of his eye; to part from the lad would be such pain as he could scarcely bring himself to face; but the ministry — Like Abraham of old, if the Lord demanded the sacrifice, he was ready to give it, so on the altar of his affections he laid his first-born, saying in a broken voice, "The Lord be with you, my son; if it is his will, I cannot deny ye to Him." And the undemonstrative Scot drew the boy close and folded his arms about him. "I'll not deny it's hard to part from ye, Archie, my lad," he said in a shaking voice.

"But it'll not be for always, father. I beeta to come back here, maybe."

"Ay, maybe."

"Grandfather will help me."

"He will, and be proud to do it. He was ever at me to encourage ye in the notion. Ye'll go straight to him, Archie, and tell him I sent ye. Now go tell your mither."

Between her pride in the prospect of her boy's becoming a minister and her sorrow at parting with him,

Mrs. M'Clean had many tears to shed, but she said nothing to dissuade him from his purpose, and he went forth from her presence comforted.

It was of Agnes that he next thought, and that evening he took his way to her home. It was late when he reached there for the winter days were still short. A golden light gleamed coldly through the trees, and shone through the door striking Agnes's auburn hair with a glory as she opened to the lad's knock. "Ah, come in," she said, pleased at sight of him. "I'm glad of company, for Polly is doing the milking, father and Mr. Willett are off hunting, and the bairns and I are all alone. Draw up by the fire."

Archie followed her to the fireside and seated himself on the settle. He looked around the bare, homely little room, at the children playing about the floor, and lastly at Agnes herself. When would he be seeing all this again? What changes would take place before he should return to this country, raw and new and full of dangers and makeshifts? A lump arose in his throat, and he turned his eyes to the fire, gazing into its glowing centre till he should recover his speech.

Agnes felt that something unusual was in the wind. She watched him for a few minutes before she said, saucily, "You've lost your tongue, Archie, the little you have."

He started and faced her, blurting out: "I'm going away. I'm going back to Carlisle."

"Back to Carlisle?" Agnes looked at him wonderingly. "Oh, Archie, you will see mother and the bairns. I wish I were going with you."

"I wish in my heart you were," he said unsteadily. "Will you come there to me after a while, Agnes, if I don't come back? I'm going to be a meenister."

"A meenister!" Agnes broke into a laugh. "Then it was no joke when we called you the dominie." Then her face clouded. "I'll be missing you, Archie," she said simply.

"Ah, will ye, Agnes? I'm fain glad to have ye say so. Couldn't ye go back there now to your mother, you and your father?"

"Oh, no, no; we've come here and settled, and there will be enough for them now. Tell them so. I have written them, but who knows if they have the letter, and you will be going straight there, Archie. Tell them they can come now, they must come, and we'll manage somehow. There'll need to be more room, and oh, Archie, you'll not be here to help us build." The thought of this made the girl's eyes moist, and she said again, "I'll be missing ye sorely, Archie."

"Then if ye'll not go back now, I'll come for you. There'll be other meeting-houses needed as the country fills up, and other meenisters for them, and I'll no stay in the east." Archie spoke eagerly.

But Agnes had recovered herself; her emotion was not so very deep. "Don't be too sure. One can't

tell what a year may bring forth," she remarked sagely.

"Will ye make me the promise, then?"

"The promise?"

"To wait till I come for you."

Agnes shook her head. "I'll make no promises, lad. I'm too foolish a creature for a meenister's wife."

"But ye're so young; ye'll sober down."

"I don't want to."

Archie's face fell, but he persisted. "Ye'll be thinking that way now, but after a bit it'll come easy."

"The promises of girls and boys are of no account," said Agnes, with more perspicuity than one would have credited her with. "Didn't you promise a year ago that when you were twenty-one you would build a home out here?"

Archie looked troubled. "Ay, but circumstances —"

"Yes, that's just it; circumstances, and who knows what circumstances will come about in another year? I'll make no promises till I see my mother again, that I told you before, and I keep to it."

"Then," said Archie, with a little smile, "it behooves me to send your mother to you."

"Ah, but; and if you do that, I will be pleased."

"Then I will try to please ye. Don't you think I am right, Agnes?"

"To try to please me? Yes."

"I meant to follow the meenistry."

"I suppose so. Tell me all about it."

At this invitation, and with a hope for her dear sympathy to carry away as a memory, Archie poured forth his heart.

Agnes listened soberly enough, but as he came to an end of his speech, she gave a little giggle.

Archie frowned. "What is so funny?"

"You in blacks." Then seeing he took it to heart, she added: "Ah, but now Archie dear, you see how trifling I am. You'll find some good serious girl at home there in Carlisle, and you'd better turn to her. I commend you to Ailsie Bell; she'd be that proud to be a meenister's wife."

Archie got up and strode across the floor with something like temper. "I want no Ailsie Bell. You've no heart at all, Agnes, and I am going away so soon — next week it will be."

"So soon as that?" Agnes was serious now. "Maybe I'll not be seeing you again."

"Maybe not."

"Ah, I'm sorry, I am, Archie, and I'd promise if I could, but I'm not staid and good enough for a meenister, and —"

"You're good enough for me."

"But I'd not be for the congregation, and I'd be scared of them, so —"

"I'll not give you up," said Archie, firmly. "I'll come back when I'm in orders, and you'll be older then, and

it will seem a holy, noble life to you to help the sinful and suffering."

Agnes looked overpowered by this burst of enthusiasm, and held down her head, looking very meek, but she saw it was not worth while to try to argue the question. She was sorry to lose Archie, and she raised her blue eyes to him wistfully as she said: "You'll bear a letter to my mother, won't you, Archie? I'll write it and bring it to you, so I'll see you again."

Archie promised and then Polly came in, and though she laughed and joked about Archie's plan, she was more impressed by it than Agnes was. He had suddenly acquired a new dignity in Polly's eyes, and she treated him with a deference born of the thought that he might one day come back and bring her to task in the matter of her children's knowledge of the Shorter Catechism, a matter which Polly was likely to pass over slightly.

Agnes wrote her letter, pouring out her full heart to her mother, and telling her that she must delay her coming no longer. With the letter safely hidden in her jacket she took her way over to the M'Cleans', where every one was full of preparations for Archie's departure, and where he was so in demand by this and that one that Agnes had not a chance to make her good-bys till she started for home, when Archie declared his intention of walking part way with her.

They were both rather silent till it came to the moment of parting. Along the path through the quiet

woods they had spoken of commonplace things, of the weather, of the news of the neighborhood, but at the parting of their paths, Archie stopped suddenly, and caught Agnes's hands in his. "Ye like no other lad so well as me, Agnes; tell me that for my comfort."

"I like no other lad half so well," said Agnes, steadily, "and I shall, oh, I believe I shall greet for you, Archie, when I come home from meeting next Sabbath." The tears were in her eyes as she spoke.

"It will be very different when I come back," said Archie, "and maybe there'll be no Agnes Kennedy to greet for me then," he added, unsteadily.

"No Agnes Kennedy? Do you think I am going to die young?" Agnes's voice was awe-stricken.

"No, but I may hear that you have changed your name."

"Oh, is that all? You scared me, Archie."

"And though ye care naught for any other lad, you'll no be giving me that promise to wait for me? If ye would but do that, Agnes, I would go away a happier lad."

"I cannot make that promise." He was still holding her hands, but now she drew them away. "Suppose you should forget me, Archie, and should like another girl better than me, I would be sitting here sorrowing for you and you would never come, or suppose I should see some one I liked better, then it would be a grief to us both, for I should hold to my promise and I should be false in doing it."

Archie looked at her wonderingly. "How wise a lass is," he sighed, "so much wiser than lads are about such things. Then will you make this promise? If neither you nor I shall see another that shall be liked better, we will wed each other when I come back to you?"

Agnes considered this for some time before she answered, "Yes, I think that is not too much to promise, for we are then both free to do as we choose, and if it makes you any happier for me to say it, Archie, I will say it."

Archie's face brightened. "My dear lassie, you do not know what dreams I shall have of this last evening."

Agnes shook her head. "You will always be dreaming, Archie, of one thing or another."

He smiled and took her hands in his again. "Will you take the half of a broken sixpence, Agnes, as a token?"

"It is what they do in story-books, isn't it?"

"Yes, and it is a sign between lovers."

"And are we lovers?" Agnes asked the question most innocently, and Archie gave a little sigh.

"We will be lovers when I see you again," he replied. "And will you write to me sometimes, Agnes, and will you keep the half sixpence? I have it here." He produced the bits of broken coin from his leathern pouch and gave her one of the pieces.

"I will keep it."

"And you will not forget your promise? Say it again, Agnes."

"What shall I say?"

"If I see no one I like better than you, Archie M'Clean, before you come to claim me, I will be your wife."

Agnes hesitated. "It sounds so solemn."

"But you promised."

"So I did. I will say it." And she repeated the words with due seriousness.

"And when I see you again, Agnes Kennedy, I will claim you for my wife, and I will promise to be a true and loving husband."

"Oh, but you didn't say anything about the other girl that you may like better!" Agnes exclaimed.

"There will be no other," returned Archie.

"All the same you must say it just as I did, or I shall not be satisfied." And Archie was compelled to make the concession.

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't kiss me good-by, I suppose," said Archie, awkwardly.

Agnes shook her head.

"But I may kiss your cheek?"

For answer she turned her soft rosy cheek toward him and he touched it lightly with his lips. The color flew to the girl's very forehead, and she turned away quickly, saying, "Good-by for the last time, Archie; I

must hurry on." She did not look back, but Archie stood gazing after her till she was out of sight.

Just before she reached the edge of the woods she met Parker Willett, who, with gun on shoulder, was coming along the river path.

He carried a bunch of partridges in his hand. Seeing the girl, he stopped and waited for her.

"It's getting late," Agnes greeted him by saying. "I've been over to the M'Cleans'. Archie is going to-morrow, and he will see my mother. Think of it, Mr. Willett. Ah me, if I could but go to her instead of the letter I sent."

"Why didn't you tell her to come to you?"

Agnes looked at him for a moment before she asked, "Would you have done it?"

"I think so. Yes, I am sure I would."

"That's what I did, then; but don't tell Polly."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because. You see Polly has made a home for us, and one cannot tell whether her husband will ever come back. Do you think he will?"

"I am afraid not."

"That's what all think but Polly, and you see the house is small, and there's not room for all us if mother and the children come."

"We can easily add more rooms or build another cabin if that is all."

"Yes, but will there be enough for everybody?"

"No doubt we can manage. Have you any brothers?"

"Yes, and Sandy is a big boy now; he can help."

"And your mother would give a hand, too, I know, from what you have told us of her. We want in this country willing, skilful, helpful workers more than anything else. It is easy to get food if there are those to help us raise and prepare it. So you'll not starve, Nancy, when your mother comes."

"You are very good to tell me that." She looked up at him with a beaming face. "I think, after all," she added after a pause, "that it was a providence that sent you to us. It would be nice," she added after a moment's reflection, "if you would marry Polly, and then she would be provided for."

Her companion laughed. "But suppose, after all, her husband should return."

"That would make a mess of it." She looked him over thoughtfully. "Do you know," she said suddenly, "now I come to think of it, I wonder why you don't get married and have your own home."

He smiled indulgently. "Because I like to stay with Polly and you," he answered lightly.

"Is that it? No, I don't believe it is exactly," she said thoughtfully. "I believe at first you thought you had done us a wrong by trying to take our clearing from us, and you wanted to make up for it, and now you — you feel sorry for us and you are staying because

you know we need you. We do need you." She nodded her head decidedly. "Everything has gone so well since you took hold, and soon we'll be having as good a clearing as the M'Cleans'."

The young man made no answer. She had followed his own thought, and he wondered that so thoughtless a little creature as she had always appeared to be should have so good an insight into his motives. "Agnes, how old are you?" he asked after a silence in which they kept the path together.

"I am sixteen. I shall be seventeen next spring."

"And I am twenty-five."

"That is quite old," returned Agnes, dubiously. "I shall have been many years married when I am that old, I suppose."

"Girls do marry young hereabouts, I have noticed. It is the need of homes, and the fact that it is not good for man to be alone. You'll make a fine woman, I'm thinking."

Agnes blushed at the unwonted praise. She had more than once been conscious that she was looked upon with critical eyes by this young man, and that it was often to her disadvantage that she appeared to him. If he thought she would make a fine woman, then maybe— She had just parted from Archie, and out of the fullness of her heart she spoke, "Do you think I'd ever make a proper wife for a minister?"

Her companion turned and looked at her sharply.

The anxious little face in the evening's glow looked wonderfully sweet and innocent. He read her thought. "No," he answered shortly. Then he quickened his pace and strode on ahead of her, leaving her feeling half indignant, half overcome with humility.

They found Jerry Hunter established by the fireside, and Polly chaffing him and joining in his big laugh. Somehow, the boisterousness jarred on Agnes. She wished that she might be alone, or that it was her mother—her mother—who would be there to give her a gentle greeting, and who would listen so patiently and sympathetically to all her doubts and perplexities. Then her conscience smote her; for whatever her faults, who was kinder than Polly? Who more lenient, more ready to cheer and comfort? Even now as the girl entered, Polly's eyes sought her, and the loud laugh upon her lips died away.

"Come, lass," she said, "Jerry has fetched us a fine haunch of venison. Go you out and bring in some of that fox-grape jelly we made, and we'll be having a feast to-night. The child's sad at parting from Archie," she said to the others as Agnes went out; "we must try to cheer her up a bit." And indeed, Agnes did seem depressed and silent more than was her wont.

And so it was that Archie M'Clean went back to Carlisle, and Agnes missed him more than she liked to confess. The youths of the settlement had taken it as a matter of course that Agnes would be escorted

everywhere by Archie, and in consequence they had sought other partners, so she felt herself suddenly bereft of those pleasant attentions which every girl likes. She prepared rather soberly for the church the next Sabbath, and was surprised upon coming out to join Polly and her father to find Parker Willett waiting for her. "Will you ride to church with me?" he asked with a magnificent bow.

Agnes swept him quite as elegant a courtesy. "An' it please you, kind sir, I will accompany you," she replied. And then they both laughed.

"I thought perhaps you'd miss your swain, the knight of the rueful countenance, and it will seem like old times to me when I used to take my little sister to church," he said, as he lifted her up.

"Oh, have you a little sister?"

"Yes, or rather she is quite a big sister now."

"Tell me about her."

He took his place with an easy grace, and as they started off he said, "She's back there in Virginia, married these two or three years."

"Was that why you left home—because she married?"

"Partly that. We were great comrades before that, although it wasn't altogether pleasant after we had a stepfather who made ducks and drakes of the property our own father left, and as my sister had what was left of her patrimony when she was married, I took what was mine and came away to seek a better fortune than

seemed to await me at home. It is not a very romantic story, you see."

"I know something about step relatives," said Agnes. "My father has some stepbrothers, and that is why he had to leave home. My grandfather Kennedy didn't make a will, and his sons all came in for a share of the property; and they had had such a lot given to them, too, so it wasn't fair. Grandfather always meant that father should have the home farm, and they knew it, but they just grabbed all they could get, and that, too, after father had lived there all his life and had helped to make the farm what it was."

"That was pretty mean. Your grandfathers don't seem to be given to making wills."

"I shall always believe that Grandfather Muirhead made his. I wish I knew more about how Humphrey Muirhead came to have that place."

"How much do you know about it?"

"Not very much. Grandfather lived there, and cleared the land, so it is a good farm. One time while grandfather was on a journey farther off, he with his companions fell into the hands of the Indians, and we always supposed he was killed. It was several years ago, and none of the party ever came back. Do you suppose Humphrey Muirhead could have found a will and that he destroyed it?"

"It is difficult to say. I should judge that he was not a man of very much principle, and it is quite possi-

ble that he would do a thing like that. Do you remember your grandfather Muirhead?"

"Oh, yes. He came to see us several times. He was a great one to travel about, and thought nothing of making the journey over the mountains. He told mother about this place the last time he came, and gave her the deeds to keep for him, and he told her the place was to be hers, but that's all the good it did."

"Well, I wouldn't grieve over it. In time you will have as good a place as that."

"It will take years, for grandfather had spent so much time and strength on his clearing; it enrages me when I think of it."

"You mustn't be enraged on your way to church," said Parker, half teasingly; but Agnes answered gravely, "That is quite true."

"We will talk of something else," Parker went on. "Polly assured me last night that her husband would soon be back."

"Why, what reason has she to think so?"

"I don't know. She has had some sort of dream or vision or something, a sign she says, and she puts great faith in it. Polly's signs are something that I cannot keep track of."

"But there are signs," returned Agnes, gravely.

"Oh, are there?"

"Of course. The Indians have a great many, and all people do."

"I suppose they do, come to think of it; but I wasn't thinking of natural consequences, I was thinking of the supernatural."

"Oh, you mean uncanny things like ghosts and noises from nowhere, and visions. We Scots believe in visions and second sight and all that."

"Yes, I know you do. But are you still Scots? Why not Americans?"

"Of course Americans, but the Scotch still clings to us."

"Like a burr, or like a true Scotch thistle. I have noticed that, and that some of you keep the Scotch pronunciation much more than others, yet every one of you say meenister."

Agnes laughed at his pronunciation of the word. "And any one would know you for a Virginian, and you are proud of it; so are we proud of our Scotch-Irish. Polly is more Irish than Scotch, and that shows plainly, too."

"It surely does." And they both laughed at the memory of some of Polly's expressions.

And when she looked back upon it Agnes found that riding to church with Parker Willett was not quite so serious an affair as Archie made it. She turned the matter over in her mind as she sat very still in church, but she gave a little sigh as she tried to fix her attention upon the long sermon. How was it faring with Archie that day? Was he thinking of her as he made his journey over the mountains?

CHAPTER IX

WHAT THE FRESHET BROUGHT

IT was quite early in the spring before the willows that bordered the run at the foot of the garden had put on their first green, and long before the paw-paw bushes showed their tender shoots or their leathery-looking blossoms. Agnes was busy pounding at the hominy block. She was well wrapped up, for though a recent thaw had broken up the ice in the rivers, and had started the frost from out of the ground so that the red mud was thick everywhere, it was still cool out of doors. As the girl worked away, giving swift, deft, even strokes, she saw Parker Willett coming toward her. "The river is rising," he said.

Agnes paused, and looked toward the run. The yellow mass of water in the river beyond was pitching and tossing, a turbulent tide. "I thought it had come to a standstill," she said, "but I see it is rising fast."

"Yes, very fast. I have been measuring, and it has risen a foot since I last looked. I hope it will not be such a big freshet as to wash us out."

"It couldn't do that, could it? I shouldn't suppose it could ever reach this far."

"No, but it might do damage to the garden."

"I hope it won't; we have such a good start." Agnes looked out anxiously between the fringes of willows.

"We won't borrow trouble, anyhow," said Parker, cheerfully.

"Best not. Mother used to say that sometimes trouble is a blessing in disguise, and even if the freshet does harm in one direction, it may do good in another."

"That is certainly a cheerful view to take of it," said Parker, laughing. And he passed on.

"Two years since I have seen my mother," thought Agnes, "and I am seventeen. Oh, when will she come? I wonder if the freshet will be a help or a hindrance to her coming. Ah, it is getting worse! I see the flood is bringing down all sorts of things. I must go down nearer when I have finished this."

Higher and higher rose the flood, all day and all night, and by the next morning river and run were one sheet of tossing, plunging water. The house stood in a little hollow, but beyond it rose a hill which descended precipitously on the other side to the river. Around the foot of the hill wound the run whose farther bank rose again to the edge of the river; the bank, not so high as the opposite one, was now covered. It was sure to be safe on the higher hill. The house was a little above the level of the water, but the garden on the hillside was encroached upon.

"It is getting pretty close," said Parker, as Agnes joined him; "just a little more and I am afraid we shall have to move out."

"Maybe it will stop before that happens," said Agnes, in reply. "What a lot of things are coming down!" She turned to Polly who had come out to see. "Oh, Polly, see, there is a shed and a lot of furniture, and oh, see, there is a queer-looking raft! There is a man on it. If he should get into that snarl of trees there, it would be bad for him. It is such a little raft. See, he is trying to steer out of the way of those snags! No, he isn't! Oh, Polly, what is he trying to do?"

"Trying to make a fool of himsel', as near as I can make out. Why doesn't he try to pole himself out of the way of those stumps? He's in danger, and if he gets into the middle of the current, he's gone."

"There's something on the stump, and he's trying to get it!" cried Agnes. "What can it be? O dear, dear! and we must stand here without being able to help him." She looked around for Parker, but he was gone.

The snarl of stumps was drifting toward the current, and they could see that the man on the frail little raft was trying his best to keep raft and stumps from mid-stream. "If he only knew how near he was to the top of the river bank on the other side of the run, he might make it. It's fair wonderful how he manages; one 'ud think nobody could live in such a rage of waters!" Polly exclaimed.

"Look there!" suddenly cried Agnes.

"For the land's sake!" Polly ejaculated. "If there isn't Park Willett in a boat! If he isn't foolhardy, I wouldn't say it. Now what is he going to do?"

"I see," returned Agnes; "he is going to try to get across the run and reach the other bank. O dear! he'll stick in the tree-tops and that will be the end of him. Oh, I don't want to look! I can't look! I wonder where father is; I hope he is safe."

"He's nowhere about here; he's gone to the other clearing," Polly told her.

"And we must stand here and see them drown!" Agnes began to wring her hands.

"We needn't. You can go in," returned Polly, sarcastically. "I'm willing to bet my Sunday dinner that Park'll make it. There he goes!"

"No, he's caught! Ah, he is clear of that. Now! Oh! will he make it? See, how carefully he sounds as he goes! Now what is he doing? I see, he is making his boat fast to the top of that tree so it can't get away. Now—why, Polly, he's throwing a line! Good lad! See, the man has caught it! I was afraid it would get tangled in the stump. What do you see?" For Polly had made a sudden exclamation.

"I'm no so sure, but I thought I saw the man there take something from that snarl of stumps. Could it be some wee bit animal?"

"Could it be a little child? Oh, Polly, could it?"

The two were now so excited that they could scarcely wait events, but there was nothing to do but to watch, and finally they rejoiced to see the raft slowly turned toward the boat in which Parker steadied himself, holding on to the branch of a tree which protruded from the water. It was a risky business, for all around surged the swift waters, flinging broken branches of trees, loose boards, and stumps in their way. But once out of the swift current they could hope to land safely. Crossing the run was no easy matter, for the tops of the trees along its submerged bank were continually menacing them, and at every moment it seemed likely that they would be upset. Breathlessly the two women watched, and finally, by the combined skill of the two men, the boat was safely piloted across to dry land. Then the two clasped each other's hands in sign of relief to their overstrained feelings.

"It is a child they are carrying," said Polly, "and the man's head is as bald as my hand; not a hair on it. Come, let's hurry in, Nancy, and have some hot water ready, for the child must be perished." Agnes followed her into the house, and was bustling about making ready some warm food when she heard an exclamation of joy and amazement.

Then the door flew open, and she turned to see Polly fling herself into the arms of the bald-headed man, crying: "It's me own Jimmy, and him with not a spear on his head, and nearly drowned before me eyes! Ah,

Jimmy, Jimmy, me true lad! Ah, I knew ye'd never lave me foriver. I've mourned for ye, lad! Ah, Jimmy, Jimmy!" and she burst into a flood of tears. And Jimmy, with one arm around Polly, half ready to cry himself, was rubbing his bald head and looking around in a maze.

"Take this little fellow," said Parker to Agnes; "he's half dead with cold and fright, poor little chap. Let those two have it out, and we'll look after the boy."

Agnes took the little fellow in her arms; he was a pretty, chubby child, between two and three years of age; he had been crying forlornly, but at the sight of a bowl of warm mush and milk his tears ceased.

Polly had gathered her own brood about her, and they were shrilly calling, "Daddy, daddy!" while Polly herself had not taken her eyes off Jimmy's face. "It's me own lad, me own lad," she crooned, rocking herself back and forth. "An' where's yer hair, Jimmy dear? An' you with such a fine crop. An' how did ye git here, an' are ye hungry?"

"Hungry I am," was the response, "as anybody'd be who'd not tasted bite nor sup since yesterday. I'd a little parched corn, but it gave out yesterday. Faith! I was not travellin' heavy handed, an' Polly, lass, lest I'd be burdened with too much to carry, I left me hair behind me." He gave a chuckle and took the bowl which Agnes handed him, eating as a famished man would.

"An' did ye know ye was coming this way, an' that ye'd find me an' the bairns?"

"Not a lick did I know where I'd be fetchin' up. I took the coorse av the river an' reckoned upon its bringing me out somewhere among daycint folks. It's the freshet ye've to thank, Polly, for the sight av me. I'd not got away but for it. The watter riz so high the redskins concluded to move their camp, and in the kin-fusion I slipped away, an' bein' a good swimmer, trusted mesel' to the watter for a bit, and then I got ashore and made me bit av raft an' consigned mesel' to the river. I caught sight av the bairn there, as I passed the snags, and thinks I, Jimmy O'Neill, ye've niver yit been onwillin' to risk yer life fur a weak little creetur, an' suppose it was one o' yer own bairnies; so says I, 'I'll save it or lose me own skin.' He was settin' there, the purtiest ye ever see, in the top av the stump, as snug as if it had been a cradle, the watter swirlin' around him an' tossin' him about. But he was well balanced, somehow, an' niver a fut did he wet."

Agnes picked up the baby from where she had set him in the midst of Polly's children. "What's your name, baby?" she asked.

"Honey," he replied. "I'se Honey, an' dad put me in a big tree an' it sailded." And that was all they could get out of him, so Honey he remained.

"How his poor mother will mourn for him," said Polly, hugging her own youngest close to her. "I wish we

could find out where he came from. I don't believe it can be very far away, or he'd be in a worse plight."

"If it isn't far, maybe we can find out," said Parker. "We'll keep him for the present, will we, Polly?"

"Will we? Am I a brute to turn a baby out into the worruld? An' on a day when he's fetched home to me by me own man?"

"I'll take care of him," said Agnes, eagerly. "I'd love to, Polly. Just hand him over to me; you've enough of your own to look after."

"But I've me man to help me now," said Polly, joyously, looking triumphantly toward Jimmy.

"What I want to know is how your man got here, and all about his doings all this time," said Agnes. "Tell us, Jimmy, where you have been all this time."

"Faith, then, with the redskins. They borry'd me suit o' hair in the first place, an' left me for dead, but dead I was not, though uncomfortable from the loss av me chief adornmint, an' after a bit one av 'em comes along: 'Ugh,' says he; 'Ugh, yersel', say I; 'I'm not dead, though I look it.' Well, he tows me along wid him to an Injun village, and they beeta keep me to kindle their fire wid; an' whin I bursts me bonds that aisy, bein' strong in me muscles an' arrums, as ye well know, Polly, they're sort o' pleased, an' seein' me advantage, says I, 'I'll do ye a better turn than to be kindlin' a fire fur ye, fur a blacksmith I am be birth, an' I'll give ye me sarvice in exchange fur me life.' Well, they pow-

wowed over it fur some time, some agreein' an' some disagreein', but in the end they give me a chanst to live, an' I won the chanst. I was plannin' to escape this long back, but the freshet risin' up so suddent gimme the opportunity I'd been lookin' fur, an' I comes in the manner I stated. I'd no time fur hat or wig, Polly, an' I'm lucky to be arrivin' with nayther."

"I hope they didn't treat you very badly," said Agnes.

"No so bad; there was another chap of me own color, paleface as they say, an' he had been with 'em this long while, so we two hobnobbed; an' though he was more content than me, we got along fairly well. He said as all o' his'n was kilt, he'd no call to leave, an' he'd not take the risk, so I kim off by me lone. I'd ha' gone back to the ould settlemint, but I'd ha' had me journey for naught."

"Indeed would ye," said Polly. "What did I tell ye?" She turned to Agnes. "Would I give up hope? Not I. I've looked for ye night an' morn, Jimmy dear, an' I knew I'd see ye agin. Faith! it's but the other day I had me sign sure, an' I was right in be-lavin' in it." She nodded emphatically in Parker's direction, and he was obliged to confess that this time the sign had not failed.

"There's wan thing I've learned, at any rate," Jimmy remarked soberly, passing his hand over his bare poll, "I'll nivir agin be skeered av the Injuns scalpin' me."

At which all laughed, and Polly rapturously embraced him. Jimmy, with all his old joking ways, was hers again, and Polly was content.

The return of the captive was a matter of great interest in the settlement, and, strange to say, to none more than to Fergus Kennedy who asked his tale of adventure over and over again, and seemed more brightened up by Jimmy's presence than by any one's.

Agnes rejoiced with the rest, but she was a little troubled lest Polly should wish to leave her before the arrival of Mrs. Kennedy, this being just the opposite of that which had been her dilemma a short time before. How easy the matter would be settled if her mother would but come at once, and they could all go to the home which the girl still insisted to herself was rightfully theirs. She did not, however, consider another point in the case till Parker Willett asked her one day if she didn't think that now Jimmy had come, it would be better for him to take up a piece of land for himself, and leave them all in Jimmy's care.

Agnes, with Honey in her lap, toyed with the child's flaxen locks before she answered. Honey had attached himself with great decision to Agnes, and she was beginning to love the little child very much. He seemed to take the place of her own small brothers and sisters more than Polly's children had ever done, and now that Polly was so absorbed in Jimmy, the girl was lonely at times. She answered Parker's question with

another. "And is it on our account you have been staying here all this time? You know I suspected it. And you risked your life for Jimmy and Honey — and — should you go far?" she asked a little tremulously.

"Not farther than I needs must to find a good bit of land."

"You will not leave the neighborhood?" She was suddenly conscious that for her there would be a greater vacuum when Parker left than when Archie went away.

"No." He watched the girl's downcast face, and he, too, was aware that he did not want to go very far away. Yet — There were no other words spoken for a moment, and then the girl raised her eyes. "Do you remember how we said at the time of the freshet that it wasn't worth while to borrow trouble? And look what the freshet did for Polly, though it did destroy a part of our garden."

"And therefore you think my going away need not be an unalloyed disaster? That is very pleasant to know. I was hardly conceited enough to think it would cause any very great sorrow."

Agnes's fair face flushed. "I meant that it might be the means of bringing you good fortune, and that would be a pleasure to your friends, however much they might miss you." She had grown much gentler since the coming of Honey among them, Parker was quick to perceive.

"If you keep on being so sweetly philosophical, I'm afraid you will soon be ready to be a minister's wife," he said with a half smile.

Agnes compressed her lips. "Oh, do you think so?" she returned coldly. Then, after a pause, "Yes, I am quite sure that Jimmy will be ample protection for us, and as it is for your pleasure and profit to go away, I advise you to do it."

There was a womanliness in her manner of speech that set him wondering. Was it the reminder of the minister's wife that so suddenly changed her? Perhaps, after all, it was not Honey, but Archie who was the cause of the new gentleness. She was trying to prepare herself for that new life with Archie; that was it. "Well, little girl," he said lightly, "then I will go; but I shall keep track of you, and I shall see you sometimes."

Sometimes! He who had been a part of her daily life for all these months would see her only sometimes, just as she was learning his worth and her own dependence upon him. She laid her cheek against Honey's hair, and the touch gave her comfort. "Poor little baby," she said, "I wonder whether your mother is grieving for you. I almost hope he has no mother."

"Perhaps he has not. Would you like to know?"

"We ought to know."

"We have tried to find out, you remember, but we can try again. I am going up the river a short dis-

tance to-morrow, — now that the water has subsided, it will be safe to go — and I'll make inquiry of every one along the way. Dod Hunter knows every one, and he may be able to tell. I am going his way."

"Oh!"

"I heard of some good land in that direction and I want to look it up."

"Across the river?"

"Yes. Have you seen the M'Cleans lately?" he asked abruptly.

"I saw them Sabbath."

"Have they heard from Archie?"

"Not yet; they expect to any day now. I miss Archie," she said simply.

"I should think you would; he was by far the best of the lads around here. But some day, you know —"

"What?"

"Did I not say just now that you were fast becoming fitted to be a minister's wife?"

"Thank you." The voice was very low. They were both silent for a time, and then Parker left her with the evening's sunshine in her hair. Why, now that he must leave her, had the girl suddenly appeared so fair to him? This new sweetness sat well upon her. How deeply blue were her eyes, and what tender lights came into them when she spoke of little Honey. Yes, it was better that he should go now — at once; later it might be harder. A minister's wife she would be, and as the

years passed by and she had learned her lessons of patience and unselfish devotion, how lovable she would become to those of her husband's congregation. "I am a middle-aged man in her eyes," he said aloud, "and it would be cruel to disturb her little tender heart now when all is settled for her, and yet — and yet —" He stood so long leaning on the fence that Agnes, watching him, wondered a little.

"He is thinking of home, maybe, and of his sister. He will be so lonely off by himself and — oh, I shall be lonely, too. Oh, Honey, I, too. Polly has her Jimmy, and poor father does not know, and if they take you, — oh, Honey, if they take you, — how can I stand it? But there is mother," she said presently; "she will be coming soon."

"Mammy," said Honey. "Dad put Honey in a tree, an' it sailded away. I lubs Nanny an' I 'ants my supper."

"Honey shall have his supper," Agnes told him, and she carried him into the house to have his mush and milk with the other children. Then she crept to her loft room. From the window she could see that Parker was still leaning on the fence. Behind the hills the sun was setting in a gorgeous sky. The willows emerging from the late waste of waters showed their first tender green; the hylos piped shrilly. Agnes's heart throbbed painfully. A beautiful world, and out of troubles sometimes arise blessings. She heard Jimmy's cheerful

voice below relating adventures to her father whose pleased smile she fancied she could see. "I am lonely, lonely," cried the girl. She arose from her little stool by the window and, with a sudden resolve, clambered down the ladder. Polly had stowed all the babies away in the trundle-bed, and the four were fast asleep. "Where are you going, Nancy?" Polly asked.

"Out to smell the spring," was the answer, as the girl shut the door behind her. She followed the path uphill to the top. Before she reached the figure standing there she paused. The glory of the sky was to be seen more plainly here. From the hollow below one might imagine the day to be done, but here one could see that rosy clouds swept across the sky and the yellow light along the horizon still shone clearly.

Conscious of her presence, Parker turned suddenly. She came and stood by his side. "One sees things more distinctly from a height," he said musingly.

"Yes, it is quite dark indoors. I was so lonely and I — I saw you here by yourself. You will be lonely, too, so often now, for you are going away — you are going away." There was a little catch in her voice, and the man at her side put forth his hand and took hers, cold and trembling, in his. Agnes looked up. His touch brought comfort. "I'm not going to be a minister's wife," she said, her lips quivering. "I could never be."

"Oh, little girl, little girl," he said softly, "how did

you know so well what to come and tell me? I was lonely, too, as lonely as you were, but I am older, much older, and one must bear those things. It is harder than you know for me to go away, but it is best. A man must make his own home."

"Yes," faltered Agnes, "I know."

"But I'll come back."

"You said sometimes, only sometimes."

"I mean very often." He looked down at her but checked the word that rose to his lips. "It would not be fair," he told himself. "I have my way to make," he said aloud, "and there are some things, some ties there at home, you know, some things that in honor I cannot forget."

"Yes." It was all that Agnes could say, but she was comforted beyond words, and the glory of the west was reflected on the face of each as they turned from the hilltop toward the little cabin nestled in the shadows at the foot of the hill.

CHAPTER X

HONEY

THE next morning Parker started forth in search of his land. Agnes watched him from her loft room; a new feeling of interest possessed her. This man who had come to them first as an interloper, and next had taken his place as a member of the household, was now become a person of the greatest consideration to her. How strange it seemed! Was his feeling for her only one of comradeship, or of pity for her loneliness? She remembered his warm clasp of her hand, the look he gave her as they turned their backs to the sunset. "Oh, I am happy," she murmured, "and I want my mother." She was so long and so quiet up there in her little room that Polly at last called to her, "Your baby is fretting for you."

Then Agnes hurried down to take Honey in her arms and to carry him out into the spring sunshine where her father was working. Honey chuckled with glee at sight of Fergus Kennedy. He had taken a great fancy to both father and daughter, and preferred to be with them rather than to play with Polly's children, who, it

must be confessed, were inclined to "put upon him," as Polly herself declared.

Jimmy was bestirring himself and filling the place with his large, cheerful presence. "How different, how different he is from Parker," Agnes thought. Polly was boisterous enough, but Polly, supplemented by a being twice as big and noisy and loud-voiced, gave Agnes a sense of being overpowered. She would not have admitted to any one that Polly was not a joy, a delightful companion, but it was nevertheless a fact that Polly and Jimmy were too much for her, in certain moods, and this morning she was glad to escape from the house.

The news of Jimmy's return brought many of the neighbors to see him and to hear of his exploits; some came, too, to offer aid in whatever direction he might require. "It's but me forge I want," he told them all, "wanst I have that, I'll make mesel' useful to ye all."

Parker Willett's going to hunt up a claim was a subject that Agnes did not care to hear discussed, though as she went out of the house she heard Polly say: "It's the dilicate way he's been brought up, maybe; but he's been pinin' for his own this manny a day, I'll be bound, an' belike he's a lass at home that he's thinking of goin' back for. Faith! he'd ought to be married; he's old enough this long while."

"Maybe he's been waitin' for you to serve your time o' mournin'," said Jimmy, jocularly, and Polly laughed

hilariously, giving him a sounding slap on the back at the suggestion.

"A girl at home. Maybe that was it, and that was why he was thinking, thinking, so long last night," Agnes said to Honey. "Oh, Honey, Honey, maybe after all he said no more because he is in honor bound. Oh, Honey, Honey." She sat down and gathered the child into her arms, weaving back and forth sorrowfully. Honey put up his little hand and patted her cheek. "Don' ky, Nanny, Honey lubbs oo," he said coaxingly.

Agnes kissed him. "Come," she said, "we'll go find daddy." Honey nodded. The plan suited him exactly. He had accepted his new surroundings with equanimity after the first day when he had called for mammy and daddy, but now he had Nanny and Daddy Kennedy, he seemed quite content.

It was a weary day for Agnes; she longed for yet dreaded the return of Parker, for she persuaded herself that it was as Polly had suggested, and that he had left his heart down there in Virginia, and she was to him but a little girl who had won his sympathy. "Yet, why? Why?" she said more than once, as she remembered that last evening. "'A man must make his own home,' he said. We have kept him from doing that, and now, now he will go away and he should have done so before. Why didn't he go? Why didn't he?" she asked passionately. "What was it he said about some tie at

home? some things that in honor he could not forget? I did not think then what he meant, but I know now. He said he was older, so much older; I am only a little girl to him."

She did not run down to watch for his coming as she had at first intended to do, but toward night her ears were alert for the slightest sound, so that Polly chaffed her for her nervousness. "You've skeert her with your tales of Injuns," she said to Jimmy; "she'll be lookin' for them at ivery turn now. Law, Nancy, you all but skeered me! What is it?" For at the sound of approaching hoof beats Agnes had started to her feet.

"Nothing, at least I thought I heard something," she stammered.

"Well, you are skeery to-night. That's nothin' but Park Willett comin' back. You've heard his horse's hoofs often enough not to jump out of your skin when he's comin'. Come, set him a place at the table; he'll be hungry. I hardly thought he'd be back to-night."

Agnes was only too ready for an occupation which would take attention from herself, and she disappeared into the lean-to just as Parker entered the door. He greeted them all pleasantly, but seemed quiet and pre-occupied, eating his supper in silence. "Where's Honey?" he asked, as he pushed away his bowl and trencher.

"Asleep long ago," Polly told him.

Parker sat looking thoughtfully at the empty bowl.

"Where's Agnes?" he asked abruptly, pushing back his stool.

Polly looked around. "She was here a bit ago. She brought in your supper. I think she's in the lean-to. Agnes, Nancy, where are ye kapin' yersel'? Don't mope there in the dark, lass."

As Agnes appeared Parker shot a swift glance at her, but she did not look at him in return, instead she crept around to the settle where her father was and cuddled down by his side.

"Well," said Jimmy, "what luck, man? Have ye rid far to-day?"

"Not so far. I was across the river. I think I've found the land I want."

"That's good. A likely piece?"

"It seems so."

"Where is it?" asked Polly.

"Just beyond Muirhead's. Dod Hunter told me of it."

"Muirhead, Muirhead, I mind that name," said Jimmy, thoughtfully.

Parker turned to Agnes. There was a grave look on his face. "I found where Honey belongs," he said without preliminary. "He is Hump Muirhead's son."

"Oh!" Agnes started up, the color dying out of her face. Then she sat down again, and, burying her face on her father's shoulder, she burst into tears.

"There, there, child, don't greet so," said Polly. "I

suppose his mother is as fond of him as you are, even if she is Hump Muirhead's wife."

"She is very fond of him; so is the father, Dod Hunter told me," Parker went on to say. "They have been nearly distracted at the loss of the child. It seems the old stump was one in which the boy was often placed when his father was at work; he was fond of taking him out with him, and the little rascal must have run off and climbed into the stump himself one day when his father was away. Perhaps he fell asleep waiting for his father to come, and meantime the stream rose and loosened the stump, so off it sailed. It is a miracle that it didn't overturn and drown the boy. At all events, it's Muirhead's boy, and I shall restore him to his parents to-morrow bright and early, or rather, I'll take him as far as Dod Hunter's, and he will see that he gets home all right."

"I'm sorry to part with the little chap," said Polly, "but I know what the feelin's of that mother must be. It's a wonder we did not find out before who he belonged to."

"Muirhead doesn't come over this side of the river very often, and since the freshet most of the people over there have been kept away by the high water and the bad roads. They never doubted but the child was drowned, Dod says. I saw Jerry, Polly. He sent his respects to you, and his congratulations upon Jimmy's return."

Polly laughed a little consciously. She knew quite well that the fact of Jimmy's return was rather a blow to Jerry.

Agnes had dried her tears and gone over to the trundle-bed where the row of rosy children were sleeping. Honey was her little cousin, and they were going to take him from her. His father was her enemy, and she could not hope to see the child again. She sat watching the little sleeper, feeling very sorrowful at the prospect of the morrow's parting.

All at once Jimmy gave his knee a sounding slap. "I have it," he cried. "What a dunderhead I am! To be sure, I know the name o' Muirhead. Who better? I hope I've not lost it," he muttered. Slipping his great hand inside his hunting-shirt, he added, as he drew forth a packet, "An' I hope it's not sp'ilt by the wettin' I got." He slowly fumbled with the thongs which tied the wrapping of deerskin. Polly watched him curiously, and Parker drew near, hardly less curious. Having satisfied himself that the contents of the packet were uninjured, Jimmy turned to Parker. "This Muirhead," he said, "what might his first name be?"

"Humphrey. They call him Hump Muirhead about here."

Jimmy nodded assent. "That's straight. Father of the young un?"

"Yes, the boy's name is Humphrey, too; but he can get no nearer to it than Honey, and so he is called."

"Well, that's not in the case," said Jimmy, with an air of importance which was rather funny. "He'd a father, I suppose, this Muirhead?"

Parker glanced quickly at Agnes, kneeling by the trundle-bed. "He had a father who was captured and probably killed by the Indians."

"Correct agin," said Jimmy. "There was another child, a daughter, was there? Why—faith! if this isn't a purty how-de-do. Come here, Nancy," he called sharply. Agnes came over and sat down again by her father. "What's your mother's name?" asked Jimmy.

"Margaret Kennedy."

"And before she was married?"

"Margaret Muirhead."

"Of Carlisle?"

"Yes, of Carlisle. She is the daughter of Humphrey Muirhead."

"Then," — Jimmy leaned back and carefully spread out upon his knee a bit of paper, the worse for wear, — "it's a quare thing I've here, an' it's quarer still that I 'ud be bringin' it at wanst to the right place, an' that I come mesel' fust off without so much as knowin' where I was. But the workin's av Providence is mortal strange. This here bit o' paper on me knee here," — he tapped it with his heavy finger, — "this here's nothin' less than a will, yer gran'ther's will, Nancy Kennedy."

"A will!" Agnes started to her feet again.

Jimmy waved her back. "Jest wait a bit, an' I'll tell

me tale; sure it's a good wan as ye'd find in a book. Yer gran'ther was took be the Injuns an' condemned to death some five or six year back as I understand. The same band o' marauders that took Jimmy O'Neill took him, but he wa'n't so lucky as Jimmy, havin' been dead this manny a day, pore soul. Well, faith, sirs, in that same camp o' Injuns was the same white man I was tellin' ye about a while back, an' when it come that Muirhead knowed he'd have to die, he gits a chanst to have spache with the paleface, who'd been adopted like into the tribe, an' is given some privileges. Says Muirhead, 'I've got to die, an' if yer a friend an' a brother, ye'll do me a turn,' says he. 'I've made me will, but not signed it, an' it's in me home,' sez he, 'an' no good is it there at all, since I can't reach me hand so far to make me mark to it. Now it's poor the chanst is, but I'd like to take it, an' I've a bit av paper here, the back av a letter, that'll do. I'll make another will an' sign it in yer prisence an' in the prisence o' some o' me comrades that's been took wid me, an' if ye'll skirmish 'round an' fetch me the paint pot the Injuns uses for their decraytin', I'll be obliged to ye.'"

The auditors were listening eagerly; it was surely a strange tale. Jimmy sat looking into the fire for a moment before he went on. "The white man, Brown be name, got him the paint, an' Muirhead wrote, wid a quill, what's here. Will ye be kind enough to read it, Mr. Willett?"

He handed it to Parker who took it carefully and read:—

“I, Humphrey Muirhead, being of sound mind, and being at the point of death at the hands of Indians, do hereby make my last will and testament. To my daughter, Margaret Kennedy, of Carlisle, wife of Fergus Kennedy, and her heirs, I will and bequeath all whereof I die possessed whether real or personal estate, with the exception of one shilling which I give to my son Humphrey Muirhead.

“(Signed) HUMPHREY MUIRHEAD.

“October 15, 1793.

“Witnesses { JOHN STARK,
WILLIAM BROWN,
HENRY FOSTER.”

“What’d I tell ye? Hear to that!” cried Polly, in ecstasy.

“Me tale’s not done,” said Jimmy, with a silencing nod. “He furthermore says to Brown: ‘It’s a poor chanst fur me daughter to git her own, but if be at any time ye see a chanst o’ gittin this to me friends, give it to anny one that’ll take it,’ says he. ‘I’ll trust ye,’ he says, ‘bein’ as yer one o’ me own race.’ Well, Brown, he’d not then made up his mind to tarry along with the redskins, an’ he says he’ll take it. So the next day Muirhead, poor soul, is despatched, an’ Brown keeps the bit o’ paper. He’s a quare fish, is Brown. The Injuns make him wan o’ them, an’ he’ll not return

to his own when he gits a chanst, but I misdoubt it ain't for a rayson, fur more'n wan o' his own color has he been able to git off to their friends. He didn't put obstacles in my way o' goin'; in truth, he rayther encouraged it, an' he trusted this to me; 'For,' says he, 'if anybody kin git away, it's yersel', Jimmy O'Neill, who's so strong. An' if ye kin seek out the darter o' this man Muirhead, he'll lie aisier in his grave if grave he had, poor soul.'"

"Oh, poor grandfather, poor grandfather!" sobbed Agnes.

"Now don't greet, child," said Polly. "He's at rest this long while."

But the tale had a silencing effect upon them all, and they sat for some time, each pondering over it. It was Parker who broke the silence by saying, "This will oust Humphrey Muirhead from his snug quarters, and give your mother, Agnes, the house you want for her."

"Yes, I know," returned Agnes, in a subdued voice, "but ah me, how strange it is that in this much desired thing there should be a sting, for we must rob dear little Honey of his home."

"He's too young to know the difference," said Polly, sharply, "and his father's well able to make him another. He's no worse off, an' not so bad as my bairns were when they were driven out with no one but their mother to do for them."

Jimmy patted Polly's plump hand. "It's the good

mother ye were, Polly, an' the bairns do ye credit. Well, this is a strange piece of news all around; it's more of a tangle than ye'll unsnarl in one evening, I'm thinking. Now, what's yer tale? I don't git quite the rights av it."

Polly told him of Agnes's quest and of the surly reception she had received; of Dod Hunter's account of Humphrey Muirhead's first wife and of his son, and at last the situation was clear to Jimmy. "Then who'll show the gintleman the will?" he asked. "I'll wager he'll drop his feathers when he sees it. I'm ready to vouch for my part of the tale."

"I am going over again soon," said Parker, "and if you will trust the will to me, I'll face Mr. Humphrey Muirhead and learn what he has to say. I am very sure that I should much prefer Mr. Kennedy for a neighbor to Hump Muirhead; it is mainly on his account that I have hesitated about the land; they say he can be an ugly neighbor if he takes a dislike to any one."

Jimmy replaced the bit of paper in its deerskin covering. "I reckon it's as well to keep this out of sight till ye see how the land lays," he said. "If so be he wants to see it, ye can take it to him or he kin come here an' have a look at it. Meantime we'll keep quiet an' wait till he shows fight. That's best, ain't it, Fergus?" He addressed Agnes's father who nodded assent. He had not taken in the gist of the matter, but was quite willing to agree with Jimmy O'Neill, who somehow appeared

to be able to arouse him from his apathy more than any one else.

In the morning Parker bore Honey away, Agnes shedding many tears over the child, to the baby's amazement and Parker's distress. "Don't, little girl," he said softly, as he leaned down from his saddle and touched her hand. "Think of that will, and of how everything will come out finely for you." But Agnes did not respond; instead, she turned and went into the house while Parker galloped off, holding Honey snugly in front of him, the little fellow delighted enough to be taking the ride.

It was a lonely day for the girl, in spite of the fact that she now could look forward to possessing that longed-for home of her grandfather's. Yet, though she tried to picture all her family gathered together under one roof, and the happy reunion that now could not be very far away, she felt an undercurrent of sadness that accompanied all her thoughts. "He said he would like to be our neighbor," she said to herself, "and he will be that, but if he brings home a wife, I would rather he would be far away." She went about her work so listlessly that Polly was quite concerned. "I didn't suppose that baby 'ud take such a holt on ye," she said. "I tell ye what ye better do, Nancy; just go over to Jeanie M'Clean's. Ye've been so clost at home with that young un that ye've skeerce been off the clearin'. Ye beeta have some change. Ye kin git the news

they'll be havin', an' if they want ye to stay awhile, there's nothin' to hinder. So be it'll break up the habit ye have o' living with the child."

Agnes agreed with Polly that this would be a good plan. She had not seen Jeanie for some time, their last meeting being the Sabbath before at church, and then they had not had the opportunity for much of a chat, for David was in attendance and Agnes had purposely kept out of the way. She began pensively to wonder how David's courtship came on, and if he had overcome his shyness, and then she sighed. "Jeanie shall not see that I am out of spirits," she said to herself, as she started forth, "for she will not understand how there could be any reason for it when everything is going so well, and I do not know myself why it is. I am a silly little goose, that is all, and I must try to put on a cheerful countenance and stop dreaming silly dreams."

And, indeed, as she ran along her spirits rose, for spring was in the air, and there is hope in the spring, even though it does awaken all the longings of one's nature; and as Agnes took her way through the sweet-smelling woods, she gradually put away sorrowful thoughts, remembering only that she would see her mother soon, and that it was Parker himself who agreed with her that out of evil might come good. Moreover, she told herself, it was only a notion of Polly's about his having a sweetheart in Virginia. Why need she believe it? There was nothing to prove it to be so.

Having taken this view of the question, she was soon in a happy frame of mind. The birds were beginning to be heard in the trees overhead; at her feet the wild flowers were springing up, and tender shoots of green were appearing to make a misty distance. The world was throbbing with expectant life, and it was foolish to suppose that a youthful heart could long despair. And therefore Jeanie's visitor appeared before her blithe and smiling.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE END OF THE VISIT

“WELL, you are a stranger,” was Jeanie’s greeting. “You’ve not been here for two weeks, and I hardly had a glimpse of you on Sabbath day. We have heard from Archie since then and I have been meaning to come over to see you, but we are so busy nowadays since Archie went away; we often wish you and your father were with us again.”

“I’ve been busy, too,” said Agnes, seating herself on the broad stone which formed the doorstep of the M’Cleans’ cabin. “Ah, but I have much to tell you, Jeanie; it seems as if I hadn’t seen you for a year. But first, what of Archie?”

“He reached grandfather’s safely and they were overjoyed to see him. He was ready to begin his studies, and will it not be fine that we shall have a meenister in the family?”

“How did the letter come, and was there none for me?”

“There was but a line. He said he would write again by the first opportunity. He had yet to see your mother, but would go at once and deliver your mes-

sages. He had a chance to send this letter at a few moments' notice, and so he could only give us the account of his health and his prospects, and that is about all. Are you disappointed that he did not write to you, Nancy?"

"I wanted to hear of my mother. I hoped she would be coming soon," returned Agnes, evading a direct answer.

"Perhaps she will be here before long; this letter was long on the way and might well have been outrun by one travelling more swiftly than the bearer who stopped often along the way. Now your news, Nancy. Were you harmed by the freshet? and isn't it marvellous that Jimmy O'Neill should have come back?"

"It is marvellous, and he is marvellous, the same old roystering Jimmy, for all his adventures. And it is so strange to see him with no hair on his head after being used to that bushy poll of his. Polly is so happy that she is noisier than ever; indeed, Jeanie, betwixt Polly and Jimmy and the bairns there is little quiet to be had anywhere unless one goes off into the woods."

"But do you like quiet?"

"Sometimes."

"Then what's come over you, Nancy Kennedy? You were a regular hoyden when last I saw you, and you to be talking of liking quiet." And Jeanie laughed.

"Did you hear about Honey?" Agnes asked, not noticing the laugh.

"What Honey? Whose Honey?"

"Muirhead's Honey, the little child who was saved from the flood."

"Law, no; at least I did hear some such tale, but it passed out of my mind at the news of Jimmy's return."

"It was Jimmy O'Neill who saved the baby and Parker Willett who rescued them both. He is so brave." Agnes spoke softly and with a far-away look upon her face.

"That was brave; tell me about it."

"He took a little skiff and ventured out upon that swift, raging water, when it was as much as one's life was worth to go a rod from shore, and all in among those tree-tops along by the run, he steered the boat till he reached a place where Jimmy could be taken in the boat, and the child, too; the baby, you know, was tucked away in an old hollow stump and was sailing downstream that way. It was Jimmy who first saw him and got him aboard his raft; but they could not have reached shore but for Parker, and he lets Jimmy take all the credit, and will not listen to a word about his own part in it." Agnes's cheeks glowed, and she talked excitedly.

Jeanie looked at her in surprise. "I thought you did not like Mr. Willett, the man who tried to rob you of your home."

"We do like him." Agnes wisely adopted the plural. "He didn't know that the house belonged to us, you know that. It was Muirhead who misled him."

"Muirhead again; he is a disagreeable uncle to have. Was the baby really his? What a strange thing! Is it a nice baby, Agnes, or disagreeable like his father?"

"He is the bonniest bairnie," Agnes replied. "I love him, and I am glad he is my little cousin, though I shall probably never see him again. Parker Willett took him home this morning, or at least he took him to Dod Hunter's, and he will see that he gets home safely. I believe the reason Mr. Willett didn't take him all the way was because he didn't want Hump Muirhead to think he had any part in saving Honey. I venture to say he has told Dod that it was all Jimmy's doings. Mr. Willett is going to leave us, Jeanie."

"Is he? I should suppose he would, now that Jimmy has come. I don't imagine you are very sorry."

Agnes was silent, but the color rushed to her face. "We shall miss him," she said after a moment. "I shall particularly," she went on bravely. "No one was ever so polite and kind to me as he, for he never will let me do a thing which he can do for me. He will bring water from the spring and will get up early to work in the garden, and he waits on me as if I were a princess. Could I help missing him? Jimmy never does those things; he isn't lazy, Jimmy isn't, but he expects us to do all the little things while he does only the big ones."

"That is more manly."

Agnes's face flamed. "No, it isn't; it may be the

way of men like Jimmy, but it isn't the way gentlemen like Parker Willett do."

"Why, Nancy!" Jeanie looked at her in astonishment. "You certainly do stand up for Mr. Willett. I think he is handsome and polite and all that, but I always felt that he was hard to get acquainted with; I mean he hasn't our everyday ways."

"I'm glad he hasn't," Agnes flashed out again.

"Oh, you are very complimentary. Perhaps you don't like our ways, either. For my part I am too independent, and I hope not so lazy that I like people to wait on me; I would rather do for myself anything that I am strong enough to do, and let the men attend to their own work."

"I would, too, in a measure; but I like to see a man ready to spare a woman when he can, and I didn't mean your ways, for your ways are our own, too, but I was thinking of Polly."

"But you like Polly and try to be like her; you are getting to be quite like her; we have all been thinking so."

Agnes looked aghast. "I didn't know it," she said faintly. "I don't want to be. Oh, I'm not. I'm not. Polly is a dear, good woman, but — but — Mr. Willett's sister wouldn't be like her, nor his mother. I can fancy them, the mother a stately dame, and the sister so dainty and sweet; I wonder he can stand us."

"I don't know what you mean," said Jeanie, loftily.

"We are good enough for any one. If he doesn't like us, he can leave us. I'm sure nobody cares about having him here, for we are all of a different race, anyhow,—I don't mean that exactly; but we are Scotch-Irish and like to go with our own kind, and he is a Church of England man and is cold and proud."

"He's not; he's not a bit. I'd like to know who are prouder and more clannish than these same Scotch-Irish, and Mr. Willett says we are self-contained and stand off by ourselves, and that is what all strangers say of us. You shall not say such things of Mr. Willett, Jeanie M'Clean."

"Well, I declare! I believe you are in love with him," exclaimed Jeanie. And then Agnes burst into tears, and at the same moment came into her mind a remembrance of how she had teased Jeanie into revealing her heart's secret, and she told herself that this was her retribution. Jeanie sat still for a moment in a state of surprise. Agnes and Archie had always been associated in her mind as lovers, and her remark was meant not to strike home, but was simply a chance shot directed because of her annoyance.

She waited till Agnes's sudden flurry of tears was over, and then she put an arm around her. "I oughtn't to have said that, Agnes," she confessed, "for there is Archie, and of course you would not think of Mr. Willett; he is too old for a girl like you, and I knew you never thought of him in that way." In the eyes of the

seventeen-year-old maid to be twenty-five was to be middle-aged. "I knew something had gone wrong," she went on, "when I told you we had heard from Archie; I knew you expected a letter, and it is a hard thing to have a disappointment like that."

Agnes hung her head. "I wasn't thinking of the letter, Jeanie," she said truthfully. "I think Archie has gone out of my life altogether, and I am not like to marry at all, for there will be mother and the children, and I am the eldest."

"Yes; but by the time Archie has finished his studies Sandy will be old enough to manage, and the others will be out of leading-strings. I am the eldest at home, too, but—oh, you will not be an old maid, Agnes, nor will I."

"Nor will you? No, I think not," Agnes smiled, "for there is David."

"Yes, there is David. That is one of the other things I had to tell. It is David."

"Really? Really, Jeanie?" Agnes caught her friend's hands in hers. "Has he summoned courage? And when was it? and when will it be? Tell me all. How could you keep it all this time, you naughty lassie?"

"I kept it till the last. I wanted to tell you since last Sabbath day when he came to sit up with me, and he and father discoursed so long upon the sermon I thought I'd never get a word from him; but when mother was putting the bairnies to bed, father heard a noise

among the beasts, and he went out to see what it was, and so — and so — then we were alone, and it was so quiet, oh, so quiet, for neither of us spoke for a long time, and then I laughed and said, ‘Why don’t you say something?’ And he — he did say something.”

“I am so glad,” said Agnes. “And does he come every evening to sit up with you?”

“Yes, every evening, and we are to be married this spring. There will be a house-raising, Nancy, and I am very happy in all except that I wish Archie were here. Father and mother are quite satisfied, for David is sober and industrious and —”

“I am a witch.”

“You truly are. I wish now you would bewitch some one yourself and follow my example if — if it isn’t Archie.”

Agnes’s face grew pensive. “I am not bewitching in that way, Jeanie.”

“Ah, but you are. I know Mr. Willett is rather old, but all do not think so, for that Sabbath when you rode to meeting with him, many said it would be a good thing and convenient all around; and since Jimmy has come back, I have heard more speculation upon the same subject.”

Agnes shook her head. “I know the gossips will talk, but Jimmy’s coming back will not affect that. All is not settled yet nor can be till my mother comes. My father seems brighter, Jeanie. Jimmy’s coming seems

to have done him good in some way. I think Jimmy stirs up his poor brain and makes it work better. Of course Jimmy and Polly will want to have a home of their own, and we shall have ours, but how and when I don't know yet. Now, let us talk of David."

"Indeed, then, I've something else to do," Jeanie replied, laughing and jumping up. "We've gossiped so long I have forgotten my work, but I regret naught said except your calling Parker Willett our better."

"Indeed, I did not mean that, Jeanie. He is no better, but different in his ways."

"Ah, that's more like it. We'll leave it so, then."

The little settlement had thriven apace, and now quite a village had sprung up around and beyond the M'Cleans'. There was talk of a schoolmaster for the children, and a site for the log schoolhouse had already been selected. Better dwellings, too, were to be seen here and there, and the Muirhead's house was no longer the best in the neighborhood. The clearings showed their garden patches thriftily planted with Indian corn, pumpkins, potatoes, and other vegetables. The rude farming implements had increased in number, and tan vats and forges were to be seen here and there. Most of the little farms displayed homely comfort, and if not luxury, at least plenty. Joseph M'Clean had worked early and late, and although not one of the earliest comers, his clearing compared favorably with the others. The outbuildings, stout and weather-safe, gave shelter for the

cattle and storage for the crops. In the woods ran wild the herd of porkers which, feasting on acorns and other nuts, were easily raised, and when one was required for food, it was despatched by a shot from Joseph's rifle. The loom and spinning-wheel were ever busy, and now would be busier than ever turning out the rolls of linen and wool which would be required for Jeanie's wedding-chest. Much talk there was over it all, the homely Scotch-Irish phrases cropping out ever and anon as the matter was discussed by the women of the settlement, who, like those of to-day, were all agog when a wedding was in prospect. To be sure the wedding-clothes did not demand very much time or attention. Linsey-woolsey, that combination of linen and wool, furnished the material for one or two petticoats. "Six hundred" linen, made from home-grown flax, was sufficiently good for a few bedgowns or sacques to be worn with the petticoats, and the same linen cut into squares and hemmed made the neckerchiefs. For winter wear there was the fur jacket of squirrel skin, and as styles did not alter, there was not much difficulty in fashioning the garments necessary. Yet with the flax hackling, the spinning, and weaving there was quite enough to be done, and Agnes was glad to lend a hand.

"If this is what calls you in," she said, as Jeanie led the way to the loom, "I'm glad to bear my part. How comfortable you have everything here, Jeanie." She looked around admiringly at the neat room, which

showed traces of the care of both the master and mistress of the establishment.

"Yes, we have everything most convenient," said Jeanie, "and it's main due to Archie. We do miss Archie and his handy ways."

"Will he no be coming to the wedding?"

"Not he. It is too far and it takes too long. My mother would have me wait till Archie could tie the knot, but David is persistent. David doesn't talk much, but when he wants to make a point, somehow one must give in to him."

"It's to be hoped, then, for your sake, that his points will be such as you can approve," laughed Agnes.

"Ah, but they will be," returned Jeanie, with the blissful assurance of one in love.

"Shall I take the loom or the wheel?" asked Agnes.

"Oh, the wheel," returned Jeanie, adjusting the heavy clacking machine before which she stood. And soon the buzz of the wheel and the clatter of the loom drowned their attempts at conversation except when Jeanie stopped to tie a thread or Agnes replenished her wool. They could, however, entertain themselves in another way, and presently Agnes started up one of the old psalms and Jeanie joined in.

Very sweet did the girlish voices sound to the accompaniment of the whirring wheel and the shuffling loom, and David thought so as he paused outside to listen. Jeanie, tall and straight, her dark eyes aglow, flung out



VERY SWEETLY DID THE GIRLISH VOICES SOUND.

her song with spirit as she sent her shuttle back and forth. Agnes, fair and graceful, stepped forward and back, and sang less vehemently but with more sweetness. "It's a pretty picture," said David to himself, "and I hate to disturb it, but a man can't keep back good news."

As his figure darkened the doorway the two girls turned, and a rosy flush mounted to Jeanie's dark cheek. She stopped her work and stood still, but Agnes went on faster. "It's not the time to stop," she said, nodding merrily to David, "or Jeanie's chest will not be full against the wedding."

"But ye'll be thinking that what I have to tell is more important than Jeanie's chest," he replied, "though maybe as it's to Jeanie's advantage to keep you at it, I had better keep silence."

"You'll not then," Agnes returned, pausing so suddenly that her thread broke off with a snap, "for not another turn do I make till I hear what you have to tell."

David gave Jeanie a reassuring nod. "You'll not have me keep it from her, Jean, when ye know what it is," he said, "though it maybe will defraud your chest. It's just this, Nancy: your mother and her bairns are on the road and must soon be here. I galloped on when I learned it."

"My mother! My mother!" Agnes clasped her hands, and her cry went up like a shout of praise.

Then without another word she ran from the house toward the road, tears of sudden joy filling her eyes.

"She made quick work with her heels," said David, looking after her with amazement. Such swiftness of movement was beyond him.

"How does she know which way to go?" said Jeanie.

"There's but the one, she thinks, and that toward the village. She'll not miss them."

"And did you see them, David?"

"I did."

"Where were they?"

"They had just come into the village on Adam Kinsey's broad."

"And then? Go on, David."

"Dod Hunter agreed to bring 'em along in his ox-cart. It's slow going, and Nancy needn't hurry."

"We might go and meet them, too. There's no use trying to overtake Nancy, but we might go on toward the road and meet them before they get here."

"There's no use going so soon," said David, "for they'll not be getting this far for half an hour yet. I'll bide here with you awhile Jean." He settled himself imperturbably. "I'll not interfere with your work," he went on, "and ye can give me a word once in a while, lass. I'd as soon treat me eyes to a look of ye as me ears to the sound of your voice," which rather doubtful compliment Jeanie was not disposed to take

amiss, knowing that David wanted nothing better than to sit and look at her.

Meanwhile Agnes had run tumultuously along the path leading to the river road, and at last, out of breath, was obliged to settle down to a walk. Her heart was all aflame with the thought of seeing her mother, and once or twice she fairly sobbed out her delight. Reared though she had been among the self-contained Scots, her later association with the demonstrative Polly had encouraged the free outlet of her youthful feelings. When at last the slow ox-team hove in sight, she again quickened her pace and went flying to meet it, crying, "Mother! mother! mother!"

The deliberate oxen came to a halt, and Dod Hunter rested his goad upon the ground as the flying figure approached.

"It's my lass! I'll be getting down. It's my lass," said Mrs. Kennedy, her voice all of a tremble. And by the time Agnes had reached the team her mother stood by the side of the road. Then in another minute the dear arms were around her, and she heard, in a broken whisper: "My lass, my bairnie! Praise God I hold you at last! It has been a weary time, a weary time."

Then came shrill little voices from the cart and the scrambling of feet over its side, and Agnes was clasped on one side by Sandy and on the other by Jock and Jessie. "Ah, Sandy, I'd know your blessed freckled face anywhere," the girl cried, giving him a frantic hug.

"And Jock, my lad, how you've grown, and Jessie, too. Bless her dear blue eyes; she's shy of me, poor child, and no wonder when she hasn't seen me for so long. But where is Margret?"

"There, don't you see? She's holding the baby," Jock informed her.

"My little brother Fergus, and I've never seen him. Ah, I must get to him and to Margret. She's the same faithful bairnie she ever was," and Agnes climbed into the cart to look for the first time upon the solemn little face of her two-year-old baby brother.

And then what a chatter there was! Between answering and asking questions Agnes hardly paused, and after a while Dod Hunter, plodding along by the side of his oxen, looked back with a sly twinkle in his eye. Agnes laughed. "I know you think me a great chatterbox, Uncle Dod; but I've not seen them for two long years, and my heart fairly seems ready to fly out of my body, and as that doesn't happen, it is the talk that will fly out of my mouth."

"I wonder ye've the breath left," said the old man, "if ye kept up the pace from M'Clean's that ye brought up here with."

"I didn't run all the way, but when I got out of breath I had to walk. Ah, but I wanted wings."

"Do you think we've changed her, marm?" asked Dod of Mrs. Kennedy.

"She is taller and not so serious."

"Who could be serious at such a time?" laughed Agnes.

"And she has a way with her that is new to me."

"It's maybe offen Polly O'Neill she has that," said Dod, wagging his head.

Agnes flushed up. She did not like to be compared to Polly, much as she loved the dear creature, and it was the second time that day that the comparison had been made. "I'll be my old self now with my mother near me," she said gravely. "I have run wild, I know, and Polly has not checked me. Polly has not your ways, mother, and sometimes I have been forgetting; but Polly is a good woman and has been like a sister to me."

"Your girl is a good, brave lass, and you've no cause to be ashamed of her," Dod declared.

"I could never be that, I well know," Mrs. Kennedy returned quietly.

Sometimes walking with Jock and Sandy, sometimes riding with Margret cuddled one side and Jessie the other, the baby on her lap, Agnes made the journey back to the M'Cleans' gate, where Mrs. M'Clean, Jeanie, and David stood waiting for the party.

"You'll better be dropping some of your load here," Mrs. M'Clean suggested.

"Oh, no, no." Agnes positively refused to consider this.

"But where will you stow them all in your bit of a cabin?"

"We'll hang them up on pegs rather than leave one behind," Agnes declared. "We'll manage somehow."

But Mrs. M'Clean shook her head as they started off. "We've a deal of room, now Archie's gone," she said, "and where they'll stow those five children, not to mention Margaret Kennedy hersel', I don't know." But she did not know Polly and her resources.

CHAPTER XII

MOTHER

POLLY'S face beamed a welcome on the travellers. The fact that the little cabin contained but the living room and the lean-to downstairs and the two little loft chambers above, did not disturb her in the least when the matter of accommodating five extra persons was to be considered. "Let me see," she said meditatively, "the two biggest lads can sleep in one o' the loft rooms, and Agnes can take Margret in with her; then the other two little ones an' my youngest can have the trundle-bed, and the father an' mother the big bed below, an' Jimmy an' mesel' with the others can go to the barn."

"Turn you out! I'd like to see us," said Agnes. "I can take both my sisters in with me, and the lads can go to the barn. They're well off to have no worse place, and they'll not mind it in the least." And though Polly protested and brought Jimmy into the discussion, it was at last managed as Agnes had suggested.

A new light came into Fergus Kennedy's eyes as he beheld his wife and children, but he seemed bewildered at seeing baby Fergus, and poor Mrs. Kennedy could

hardly restrain her tears. In these long months letters had passed but seldom, and Agnes had written cautiously of her father's condition. She was always hoping that he would be quite like his old self, or, at the least, very much better by the time her mother came. He seemed quietly content, and followed his wife everywhere, but there was no enthusiasm; and to the weary traveller, arrived in a new country, happy though she was at the reunion, there came a little heart-sinking as the night approached. After the younger children were sleeping sweetly and Fergus had gone out with Jimmy to see that all was safe at the barn, the mother sought her first-born, for whom her heart had been yearning all these long months.

Agnes had not gone to bed, but she had seen that her little sisters were comfortable, and then she had crouched down by her small window, and sat there looking out into the starry heavens. Outside the forest girdled the house, while beyond one could catch, here and there, the gleam of the river through the trees. All was silent except for the cry of some wild bird in the deep woods, or the barking of a fox in the underbrush.

Mrs. Kennedy drew up a little stool, and Agnes, her arms around her mother's waist, sat on the floor by her side. "It is good, so good to have you, mother," said the girl.

Her mother stroked the soft auburn hair and drew her daughter closer, but she said nothing.

"What are you thinking of, mother? Does it seem very strange to you here?" Agnes asked.

"I am thinking of how lonely my little lamb must have been for many a day in that first settlement where wolves attacked her and where Indians threatened, and how, if I had realized it all, I think my heart would have misgiven me when it came time to have her go."

"It was lonely," Agnes confessed, "but since we came here it has been less so, and the Indians are not so troublesome now that the settlement grows and thrives, and only those who stray too far need fear. You are not afraid of them, mother?"

"No; yet, when I saw your father and felt what it was they had done to him, a horror arose within me."

"Yes, I miss father," returned Agnes, "father as he was, but he might have had a wound as bad in war, and he does grow a little better—he really does; he was much worse at first. Oh, mother, I am glad for his sake that I came with him, for they might never have found him that dreadful day."

"Yes, yes, I know, and I am thankful, so thankful that I have both my brave daughter and my husband spared to me, though your father does seem so strange. And there was my own poor father, too, a victim to the savages."

"Ah, yes. But, mother, you have not heard. Such a wonderful thing I must tell you. There was a will,

after all." And Agnes told her the whole story, her mother listening eagerly. "And now," she said, as she concluded, "Mr. Willett will take steps to see that we get our rights."

"Thank God!" ejaculated her mother. "Ah, my dear lass, I was sore hearted to know what we would do, for the space here is main small for all of us."

"Yes, but it is coming summer, and we need not mind. Ah, mother, I am used now to this backwoods way of living, and you will be, too, soon. I am afraid it will be some time before we can get possession of the house, for Humphrey Muirhead will stay till he is put out. Did you know about him, mother?"

"Yes," she answered slowly. "My father told me the last time that I saw him alive. 'He's no credit to us, daughter,' he said, 'and will likely never cross your path. I'd have more for you but for him, and it's but right that what is left should be yours, although he is the eldest and bears my name. I have made my will,' he said —"

"Did he tell you that?"

"He told me that."

"But he did not sign it. I think that ruffian uncle of mine must have known about it."

"If he did not sign it, of course it was of no value. Your grandfather had a housekeeper after my mother's death; the woman was a half-breed, but quite a good creature. I don't know what has become of her. The

house is a good one, your grandfather said, and the farm was well stocked."

"I'm afraid, from all accounts, that it is going to be hard work to get anything, but we shall see. It is a good thing to have friends, mother."

"And this Mr. Willett, he is a good friend? You remember I haven't seen him."

"He is a good friend," Agnes answered slowly, "and so are the M'Cleans. You saw Archie?"

"Yes, a fine lad." She laid her hand gently on Agnes's head. "What did he tell me but that my little girl would have the chance of becoming a meenister's wife?"

"He told you that?"

"Yes."

"And what did you say?"

"I said, 'My little lass is far too young.'"

"Am I so young? Seventeen, mother."

"So you are. I did not count in the years you have been away from me, but you will not leave me now, my lamb? Not yet?"

"Oh, mother, I have no thought of such a thing. Archie is a good laddie and has been kinder than I can tell you, but I do not think of him in that way. He will be away long enough to forget, I think."

"Not forget, boyish though his love may be, but he may learn to care for some other with whom he may be thrown. Yet, I would not object to giving my little girl

to a good man, and I might like the honor of becoming mother-in-law to a meenister."

"You'll be no one's mother-in-law yet awhile." Agnes gave her mother a fervent hug. "I shall help you to raise the children, and you know, you have much to learn of me, for I am a pioneer this long time, while you are quite new to it."

"Saucy little child, to talk of teaching your mother. This Mr. Willett, when shall we see him? I have many questions to ask him."

"He comes quite often."

"He is a young man?"

"Not very; he is twenty-five."

"I call that quite young. Agnes, my lamb, is that why you are not ready to be a meenister's wife?"

Agnes's head dropped against her mother's shoulder, and she did not answer for a moment. "He does not think of me," she said after a moment, and in hurried tones. "I — I — Polly says he has a sweetheart in Virginia."

"But you think of him?" The mother was quick to note the hesitation and the evasion. "Ah, my baby, has it come to you then, womanhood's dream?" she said gently.

"Nothing has come to me," Agnes broke out passionately. "I have been motherless and well-nigh fatherless, and tears have been my portion."

"My lamb! My lamb!" the mother murmured

brokenly. "You are no longer motherless, nor have ever been friendless; and, ah, my bairn, if you but knew what a comfort it was to me to hear from Archie M'Clean how brave and strong and helpful you have been."

"I've not always been brave and strong, and I grew wild and naughty for a time till — till — they said I was like Polly. Have I grown like Polly, mother?"

"Only in some little gestures and tricks of speech, yet you might well imitate her in many ways."

"So I say. Dear Polly, she has been so good, so good to me, and I love her and will not hear anything against her."

"You are right to be loyal, but now, my lamb, it is late and you are tired."

"And how tired you must be, too. Go to bed, dearest of mothers. I shall be so happy to know you are near me."

"And yet a moment ago you were not happy, even with your mother."

"I was very naughty. Please forget that wild talk."

But the mother did not forget, and she looked with critical eyes upon Parker Willett when he appeared a few days later. She saw a tall, dignified young man, slim, dark eyed, dark haired, with resolute chin and a mouth whose grave lines gave rather a severity to the face except when the man smiled, and then one noticed both humor and sweetness.

He greeted Mrs. Kennedy with marked courtesy; here was a woman of his own kind, and he was quick to recognize it. He was also quick to see that Agnes had gained in her own manner since her mother's arrival, unconsciously imitating her quiet and gentle dignity, and almost the first words he said to Mrs. Kennedy were, "It is well for your daughter, Mrs. Kennedy, that you have at last come; she has missed you sadly."

"And has needed me?" Mrs. Kennedy smiled.

"Yes, I think that, too. Every girl needs a wise, good mother. I saw—" he turned to Agnes—"I saw Humphrey Muirhead to-day."

"Oh, did you tell him?"

"About the will? Yes."

"And what did he say?"

Parker smiled. "I think it would hardly do to repeat his very uncomplimentary remarks, but he vows you will never set foot on the place."

"What of your own land?"

"I have bought it."

"You are not afraid of having such a disagreeable neighbor?"

Parker gave a little amused smile. "Whom do you mean, you or your mother?"

Agnes smiled, too. "So you do count on our being your neighbors in spite of what Hump Muirhead says?"

"I certainly do."

"But you must not take any risks on our account," Mrs. Kennedy was quick to say.

"But he saved Honey's life," Agnes remarked.

"You mean Jimmy O'Neill saved Honey."

"But you saved both. Doesn't Hump Muirhead know that?"

"What a disrespectful way to speak of your uncle," laughed Parker. "What will your mother think?"

"That I've neither wish nor right to show him the respect he does not command. But doesn't he know about your saving Honey?" she persisted.

"No, if you call it that."

"I do. Oh, mother —" she checked herself; she would not for the world praise him for his bravery lest one or the other should suspect how pleased she was to do it. "Did you see Honey, the dear baby?" she asked, giving a turn to the subject.

"No, I saw only the man himself; I met him on the road."

"Do you know, I have a baby brother, only a little younger than Honey, and I had never seen him before mother came."

"I am glad you have some one to fill Honey's place, and some one from whom you will not have to part. She was very loath to give up her little cousin," he told Mrs. Kennedy.

"Agnes always was a great hand for the little ones," Mrs. Kennedy replied.

"And you must have missed her sadly when she left you for this raw country."

"I missed her, yes." The mother's eyes rested fondly on the girl, and Parker's followed the look. He wondered if the mother noted how becoming was that soft blue and how the plain little gown brought out the color of the girl's eyes.

"What did you say about the will?" Agnes asked, eager for more information.

"I told him that the will would be entered for probate, and that your mother would claim her own."

"What did he say to that?"

"He insisted that he must see the will and that he would take no man's word for it. I promised him that I would bring it with me for his satisfaction, and Jimmy has intrusted it to me. It will be all right in time. I shall not show it to him except in the presence of witnesses. There may be some trouble about getting possession, for Muirhead, on account of his long residence out here, has been able to gather about him rather a lawless set of followers, and they may try to do something to prevent peaceable possession; but in the end there must be enough of your friends to see justice done. You have not come to a very law-abiding neighborhood, so far as these backwoodsmen are concerned, Mrs. Kennedy, but the country is settling up very fast, and there are enough men of good standing here now who will not allow any irregularities."

"Every one is very kind ; I never knew such hospitality. We have had offers of help from near and far, and a score of homes are open to us. In time I know we shall be very happy here, though at first one naturally misses some things."

"Yes," Parker nodded in response. "One misses a great many things ; I felt so ; but it is a great country, after all, and there are better chances here than at home ; that is plain to be seen by the way the people are flocking from the east and south. I should not be surprised if we would soon become a state."

"It certainly seems as if a lot of people were coming," Agnes ventured to say. "I hardly ever go to the M'Cleans' but I hear of new arrivals, and every day we see the broads go by on the river. Ah, yes, we were wise to come, mother."

Her mother wondered if it were so, as she saw the light that had gathered in her girl's eyes since this young man had come in. He was a gentleman, surely, just such as might win the heart of a trusting little lass, but she must be watchful lest the child should come to have heartache.

"I have a bit of a cabin started, and will be at home very shortly," the young man told them in answer to their questions, "and in the meantime I shall stay at Dod Hunter's. Jerry and the other boys are helping me, and I shall soon be having my own fire-side."

"An' you'll be invitin' us over to sup," said Polly, who had joined them.

"Yes, if you will cook the supper, I'll provide anything you say, and we can have a little housewarming that will suit the size of the house."

"Deed, an' I'll cook annything, an' we'll show Mrs. Kennedy how a clearin' looks before it's cleared. Will ye be takin' yer belongin's this trip?"

"I may as well; I've not much of a bundle, but I've trespassed upon your space long enough."

"Run get the little box up aloft, Agnes," said Polly. "I've kept that by itsel' knowin' ye valued it, an' the rest, a little fardle o' things, I've in the lean-to."

"No, don't trouble yourself, Agnes," Parker hastened to say, but she was already halfway up the ladder. It was pleasant to be able to do him even this slight service.

The little box was where Polly had put it, high on a shelf; it was a small, flat affair, neatly made of two or three different kinds of wood. It lay under Polly's Bible, and, as Agnes stood on tiptoe to reach it, she knocked down both box and Bible, and, in trying to save the latter, the box fell on the floor. It was strong, and was not injured; but in the fall a spring struck the floor, and a sliding panel flew out; then two or three bits of paper fell from their hiding-place. Agnes picked them up one by one,—two or three letters and a carefully made pencil-sketch of a girl's head. Beneath it was

written "Alicia." Agnes felt the blood surging to her face as she stood with trembling fingers holding the picture. It was then as Polly had surmised. "For I know it is not his sister," she whispered; "he told me her name, and it is Elizabeth. I could not forget that." She noted the haughty, high-bred air about the pose of the head, the curve of the perfect lips, the pile of hair carefully arranged, the filmy lace kerchief. She slipped the papers and portrait back into their place and hurried downstairs, but she was very pale as she handed the box to Parker. "I dropped it," she said truthfully, "but I hope nothing is hurt."

"I am sure everything is quite safe," he assured her. "It is not a very large, strong box, but it holds most of my dearest possessions." He opened the lid and drew forth three miniatures. "See," he said, "these are my treasures. This is my mother;" — he showed it to Mrs. Kennedy; "this my sister Elizabeth, whom we call Betty," and he handed Agnes the second case, "this my father," and into Polly's hands he gave the third. "There are, too, some of my father's last letters, and one or two other little things which I prize."

"You look like your father," Polly said, scrutinizing the miniature she held.

"He died when I was ten years old, so I remember him perfectly. My mother married a second time," he informed Mrs. Kennedy.

"Therefore, unless your stepfather is a very unusual man, you must miss your own father very much."

"I did, and because of this second marriage I left home after my sister was married."

Agnes was gazing at Betty's pictured face; it was bright, piquant, very fair, very young. She handed it back without a word, and her heart was troubled, for her thoughts were with that hidden portrait.

She was very quiet the rest of the day, but toward evening she climbed the hill and stood looking off across the river. Presently Parker would come that way, for he used a little skiff more frequently; it saved him the long ride to the ford farther above, and when the river was not high, it was a pleasanter method of travel. After a little waiting she saw him coming. How straight he was, and tall! She shook her head impatiently and looked away. In another moment he was at her side. "Come, go out on the river with me for a little while," he said as he came up. "The days are getting so much longer that it will be light for a great while yet, and this evening is the warmest we have had."

Agnes hesitated. "I must tell mother."

"I asked her, and she consented to my taking you, so long as I did not keep you out too late."

He held open the little gate for her to pass out, and they followed the zigzag path down to the river's brim. A little skiff was drawn up on the sands; they stepped

into it, and Parker took the oars. "How silent you are to-day," he said after a while. "Has your mother's coming made you so?"

"No, not that. I—I—have something to tell you. I didn't want to before every one." She paused a minute and then went on. "When I let the box fall, something fell out from the back of it, some letters and—and—a picture. I picked them up and put them back again, but I wanted to tell you that I couldn't help seeing the picture."

The man looked at her with an inscrutable smile. He rested his oars, and drew from his hunting-shirt the flat box. Pressing the spring he slid back the panel and drew forth the picture and letters; the last he tore into bits and tossed out upon the waves; the picture he looked at with a little scornful smile, and then that, too, he tore across and tossed overboard. Then he gave a deep sigh, picked up his oars, and pulled steadily. Agnes watched him wonderingly, but she said not a word.

"Honest little girl," he spoke at last, "it was like you to tell me that, and now it will be my turn to confess. I have told you of our old plantation life, of the father whom I so well remember, of my little sister, of my mother whose marriage robbed us of all our heritage, but I have not told you of Alicia, my neighbor and playmate. From the time I was a small chap, I always said I would marry Alicia, then when I grew

big enough to go away to school and Alicia, too, was sent to boarding-school, when I thought of what vacations would bring me, I thought of Alicia. Her father and mine fought side by side in the Revolution, and their interests were the same. Then my father died, and after a while my mother married again. When I was twenty-one, I found that in lieu of falling heir to a good estate I was practically penniless. My first thought was to take advice from Alicia's father, and his advice I followed. I came west to carve out my fortune." He stopped a moment and then went on. "Yet Alicia's father, to this day, does not know that I followed his advice because I could not hope to win his daughter. Agnes, little brave girl, you would not turn a man, your lifelong companion, away from you because he was poor, would you?"

"I? No, oh, no; not if I loved him, and if I knew him to be good and true."

The man pulled up-stream steadily for some time before he spoke again. His thoughts were far away. He saw the fine old plantation, Alicia's home, its host of slaves, its wide veranda where dainty ladies sipped their tea, its lordly dining hall upon the table of which glittered old silver and cut glass. He saw Alicia herself, stately, fastidious, luxuriously clad, and he looked opposite him at the little pioneer lass, bare-footed, bare-headed, her linsey-woolsey petticoat the worse for wear, her kerchief of coarse linen knotted at

the throat, her hands sunburnt, but in her eyes the light of truth and innocence, and he smiled a sudden bright and tender smile. "And so, Alicia, I am done with you," he said aloud. "Forever and aye I am done with you. Float down the stream of time in another current than mine. I wish you no ill, but for me I care no more for exotics. Now, Agnes, you know my story, and you are sole witness of how Alicia and I have at last parted company. I tell you, Agnes, her mother is no more gracious lady than yours; but if ill-fortune befell her, would she throw back her head, as I have seen some one do, and go forth to meet fate face to face, saying, do your worst, I will defy you? She couldn't do it, Agnes, and even if she could—well, by this time the water has washed her image quite away. So there's an end of it, Agnes Kennedy, and for the rest of time I am Parker Willett, pioneer, and not Parker Willett, gentleman. Now, Agnes, I will take you home to your mother. This is good-by for a time, too."

The color had come back to Agnes's cheeks and the light to her eyes. "Thank you for telling me that," she said, as the boat's landing was made. "No, don't come back with me; it is early still, the sky is quite light, but you have to go across, and you will have quite a distance to ride before you reach Dod Hunter's."

"I feel singularly free and happy," said Parker, holding her hands. "It is a good thing sometimes to throw one's troubles overboard. But for you, Agnes Kennedy,

I should not have done it. I've not exactly burnt my ships behind me, but I've thrown care to the winds, and I mean to be as happy as you will let me."

"As I will let you?" Agnes's blue eyes opened wide.

"As you will let me; I repeat it. Good night, good night, little girl. Run home quickly. I shall stand here and wait till I know you must be safe."

Agnes ran up the steep path, and having gained the top of the hill she looked back. He was still there. He waved his hand to her, and then she disappeared over the brow of the hill.

CHAPTER XIII

PLOTTING

IT was two days after that Dod Hunter appeared at the clearing. Agnes was busy outside the house at the hominy block; it took a deal of hominy these days to satisfy so large a family.

"Park Willett here?" asked Dod, abruptly.

"No, he is not." Agnes paused in her work and came forward.

"Humph!" ejaculated Uncle Dod. He looked at her sharply and appeared to be considering something.

"Isn't he at your house?" Agnes asked anxiously.

Dod shook his head.

"He left here on Tuesday," Agnes went on. "Tuesday evening just before dark. I saw him get into his boat about sundown; he was going to your house from the other side. Did you come around that way?"

"No, I come by the ford."

"It is very strange, for he told me he would be staying at your house till his own was ready for him."

Dod moved uneasily in his saddle, then he slipped down and led the horse away some distance. "Come

here, Nance," he said, "I've got to look into this. You ain't the faintin' kind, I know, but there's something wrong, I'm satisfied. Now, don't look so skeered; I reckon we'll get at the bottom of it. Is there anybody about here that 'ud be likely to be an inimy o' hisn?"

Agnes shook her head. "No one that I know of. He never seemed to have any very intimate friends, but he is always pleasant to everybody, and I think nearly every one has a good word for him."

Dod wagged his head again. "Nobody want to rob him o' anythin'?"

Agnes paused before she answered. She thought first of the miniatures, but who would want such purely personal things? Then like a flash came a thought of the will. Parker carried that. Humphrey Muirhead knew it would be in his possession. "There is something," she said breathlessly; "it is the will, Uncle Dod, my grandfather Muirhead's will. Mr. Willett has that and Hump Muirhead knows it."

Uncle Dod made an exclamation and said something under his breath. "You've hit it, girl. Trust a woman's wits. I'm glad I tackled you first. You've hit the nail on the head. I'll bet my shirt he's up to some sort of scheme to get that will. I remember he told me about it. That's good, too, fur I can testify to that. Oh, we'll outwit Hump Muirhead, don't you fear."

"What do you suppose he has done?"

"Kidnapped him, likely." He brought his fist down with a thump into the palm of his hand. "I'm an ijit! Why didn't I think of that before?"

"What?"

"I heerd a pack o' horses go by in the middle o' the night. They turned into Muirhead's woods. I heerd some one say, 'Keep quiet, boys, can't ye?' I'll bet it was them."

"Where do you suppose they have taken him? Will they hurt him?"

"Reckon not. They're after the will. I rayther think Hump'll take him to his place and hide him somewheres, drug him maybe, and get holt o' the will, then he'll brazen it out that there wa'n't none, an' never had been."

"But we've all seen it."

"Don't make no difference; he'll say that it's a scheme to defraud him, an' he'll bring a lawsuit, an' ef they ain't no proof, likely he hopes to win it. It's jest like his contrivin'. Oh, I know Hump Muirhead from A to izard. But we'll get a holt o' him. I will count on my boys. Jimmy O'Neill at home?"

"No, he's gone to the village."

"Lemme see, then. Your father don't count. Who's nearest?"

"David Campbell; but he was going away to-day."

"I'd like to scare up somebody like Jimmy, but with my three boys an' any one else I may chanst to git a

holt of, I reckon we'll down 'em. I don't reckon they was more'n half a dozen in the pack. I kin count Hump Muirhead's gang on one hand. Well, Nancy, I'll be off, the sooner the better. S'posin' you don't say anything about this to yer mother. She's new here an' don't know the didos these here backwoodsmen kin cut up; besides it's part her affair, an' Hump bein' kin o' hern, it might make her feel bad. Kin ye keep yer mouth shet?"

"I should hope so," Agnes returned proudly.

"'Pears to me land's plenty enough not to be making such a hot fuss about that place o' Muirhead's. Why don't he give it up peaceable? Big, heavy man like him could easy start an' clar up another place in no time. I believe in fightin' fur my rights, but I'll be switched if I believe in bullyin' wimmin folks. I declar, gal, ye look whiter'n my old hoss. I've skeered ye good, hevn't I?"

"I'm not scared, except—except for Mr. Willett. I feel as if that Muirhead wouldn't stop at anything."

"Blest if she ain't right," said Dod to himself, but he put on a cheerful face and said, "Don't ye cross no bridges till ye come to 'em. I'm off now, and I'd be willin' to bet ye a pretty that Park 'll be settin' in my house inside o' twenty-four hours. Keep yer mouth shet, remember." And he rode off.

Agnes, with palpitating heart, stood for a moment powerless. Then she rushed to the house. "Mother,"

she said, trying to speak calmly, "do you mind if I go across the river to Hunter's for a while?"

"So soon ready to leave your mother?" replied Mrs. Kennedy. "Ah, but youth does love change."

"It isn't that I love change, but there is — it may be that I am needed there."

"Anybody sick at Hunter's?" asked Polly, putting down the huge horn spoon she held. "Didn't I see Uncle Dod come in just now?"

"Yes, he was here, and some one is — perhaps —," faltered Agnes. "It really seemed important that I should go and see what is the matter." She gained courage as she went on.

"Oh, well, if it is a case of sickness, of course go," her mother returned, "but I really think Polly or I would be of more use."

"But I might have to stay, and can be spared better than either of you."

"That is true. But you will not go alone? Is Mr. Hunter waiting for you?"

"Nothin's goin' to hurt her," said Polly. "She's used to runnin' wild, ain't ye, Nancy? She knows this country like a book, an' it's no distance to Dod's once ye cross the river, though it's a good bit further if ye go around."

Agnes had not waited to hear the last words. She was conscious that she had misled her mother, and that it would grieve her who always set a value upon the exact

truth. "But I must go, I must," she murmured to herself. "I didn't think to tell Uncle Dod, and I think I could maybe tell the tale better than any one else, I who saw it all."

She ran toward the hilltop, then down on the other side to the river's bank. Here she had last seen Parker standing. "Ah me, if he be but safe," she whispered. "Oh, my dear, my dear, if we can but save you. 'I will be as happy as you will let me,' he said, and I was so glad, so glad." She had no difficulty in finding the little skiff always drawn high up into the bushes; dragging it down she soon had it afloat, and plied her oars with all haste. More than once had she rowed across, and her strong young arms found it an easy task. Once on the other side she made no tarrying, but struck off into the bridle-path, and was soon at Dod Hunter's gate. There were four men standing in the yard; a fifth was just coming from the house.

"Nancy Kennedy! I'll be switched if it ain't the gal," said Dod, as Agnes appeared upon the scene. "What's up?"

"I'm going to Muirhead's with you." One of the men turned and looked at her. Agnes recognized him. He was Dr. Flint, a friend of Parker Willett's, and she remembered his history. A man well born, well educated, but one who had been wild and dissipated, and who had drifted west where he led a reckless, irregular life, sometimes practising medicine, sometimes living for

months among the backwoodsmen. Finally he made the fatal error of giving a wrong medicine to a man who was not on very friendly terms with him. When the man died, though Dr. Flint's friends knew that he was dazed with drink when he made the mistake, an angry crowd of the dead man's companions charged him with doing it purposely. Dod Hunter, Parker Willett, and one other kept the crowd at bay till they had convinced them of their injustice, and had swung their sympathies around toward Dr. Flint. After this he would never prescribe for any one. He did not object to practising surgery, and he had kept perfectly sober for several years. Dod Hunter and Parker Willett could claim any service from him, as well they might, since he owed his life to them. Agnes remembered all this sad story, and was glad to see the man there. She knew his devotion to Parker, and knew that nothing would stand in the way of his defence of him.

As the doctor eyed her sharply Dod Hunter gave him a nod. "Friend o' Park's," he said. "Good little gal. I shouldn't wonder if Park was sweet on her." Then to Agnes who had not heard the aside, "So, lass, yer ready to jine the s'arch party, are ye?"

"I am going to Muirhead's."

"What for?"

"To see Humphrey Muirhead and tell him who saved his little boy. If I can't see Hump, I will see his wife and tell her and make her promise to tell her husband."

Dod nodded approval. "Good scheme, but maybe it won't work, and we ain't no full proof that he's got Park."

"It will do no harm if he hasn't."

"That's true, too. Come along, then, if you want to go with us. We're not likely to have a pitch battle before we git there, and a gal that has fit Injuns ain't goin' to squeal at sight of a gun. Will ye hoof it or shall I git ye a hoss?"

"I'll go as you do. I should think you would know that," Agnes replied with some asperity. "It's not the first search-party I've gone with, Uncle Dod. You know I was with them when they found my father."

"Sure enough. I mind their tellin' me of it at M'Clean's. Start on, boys." The rescuing party set forth, but there was no sign of a human being to be seen in any of the haunts to which the Hunters led them.

"I shall go to the house," Agnes declared her intention, "and you may come with me or I will go alone, whichever Uncle Dod thinks best."

The men debated the proposition. "I don't know as it would be well to let Muirhead know we have wind of the thing," said Dod Hunter, "but I have my doubts about it's bein' the right thing for us to let a gal go up there alone."

"I'm not afraid, if that is all," Agnes said.

"It ain't whether you're afraid," said Jerry, "but I reckon four good-sized men ain't a-goin' to see a gal do

what they hev a right to. I say we all go." And his proposition was acted upon.

Meek little Mrs. Muirhead came out to meet them, and with a frightened air replied to the questions put to her. No, Hump wasn't at home; he had gone off the night before, hunting, he said; had come back to breakfast, and then had ridden in the direction of Mayo's.

"Was he alone?" asked the doctor.

"When he went to Mayo's? Yes."

"No, I mean when he came in this morning."

Mrs. Muirhead twisted her fingers nervously and looked furtively toward the house. "No, he wasn't," she informed them in a low tone. "There was half a dozen men with him. They were in the house for a while." She saw them coming, but they went in the front way, and Hump had told her to keep away, that if she dared to disturb them or go into that room where they were, she'd never go in there again. He didn't mean that, of course; he often talked so, but she thought she'd better keep out of any fuss. They went away later; she heard, but did not see them, and after Hump had his breakfast he went, too, but the door was bolted and locked.

"When will he be back? Did he say?" questioned Agnes.

"Oh, soon."

"We will wait, then."

Mrs. Muirhead nervously asked them to come into

the kitchen, an invitation which Agnes and the doctor accepted. "We'll keep watch outside," said Dod Hunter, in an undertone.

Agnes responded by a nod. The girl looked pale and tired from her long tramp and from the strain put upon her, and she gratefully accepted the drink of milk which Mrs. Muirhead timidly proffered her guests. The three or four little children stood around open-eyed. Honey, with a cry of joy, had run to Agnes, and she took comfort in sitting with the child cuddled up to her.

"That's his daddy's favorite," Mrs. Muirhead informed them. "He sets great store by Honey, and went on like a wild creetur when he thought he was drowned. I'm sure we all never expected to see him again, and I'm in hopes some day I kin git over to Mis' O'Neill's and tell her how thankful I am to him and her for taking care of him."

Agnes was too perturbed to talk much. She listened for the least sound. Every stir of a leaf seemed to her tense nerves to indicate the approach of a horse. "I feel sure there is some one in that room," she said in a low tone to the doctor when Mrs. Muirhead stepped out for a moment.

"Is there no way to get in from above?" he asked.

"No, the only stairway leads to this room."

"Does your father always lock the door of that room when he goes out?" asked the doctor of one of the children.

"No, only sometimes," was the reply.

"How is it fastened?"

"It is bolted on the side this way, and locked on the other."

The doctor sauntered out, and in a few minutes Agnes followed. She found the doctor examining the door from the outside. "That's a pretty strong lock," he said. "I thought perhaps we could see through the window, but there is a heavy shutter, and it is closed tight. I suppose if we break in we can be accounted burglars."

"I'm willing to try it," returned Agnes. "As matters stand this property belongs to my mother, anyhow. I'll try if you will."

For answer the doctor drew a small case of instruments from his pocket, and selecting one he prepared to cut away around the lock. There was a subdued movement inside. Agnes clasped her hands. "Oh, hurry, hurry," she cried. "Let me help." And by degrees weaker and weaker became the barrier, and finally the door was forced open. In the dim light of the room was seen upon the floor a man's form. He was tied hand and foot.

"It is Mr. Willet! It is Parker!" cried Agnes, rushing forward.

"Open that other door and get some water," ordered the doctor, as he felt the cold face of his friend. Agnes obeyed. The children came flocking in. Mrs.

Muirhead stood anxiously upon the threshold, not daring to go farther.

Presently the doctor lifted Parker to his feet, but at the same moment a voice thundered, "Touch that man and I'll shoot him dead!" And turning, they saw in the doorway Humphrey Muirhead's dark countenance distorted with rage. The man was levelling a pistol at his prisoner.

As Agnes caught sight of the vindictive look, it seemed as if she might be sure that Humphrey's revenge would stop at nothing short of murder, and, catching up little Honey, she interposed his form between that of Parker Willett and the enraged man in the doorway. "Fire, if you dare!" she cried. And the pistol dropped to Humphrey Muirhead's side.

At the same moment Dr. Flint exclaimed, "Good heavens, man! would you commit murder to accomplish your ends?"

Humphrey Muirhead wheeled around upon him. "You're here, are you? You talk of murder? What are you? If you had your deserts, where would you be? There is fine set of you, your righteous partners who begged you off, and yourself; all of you deserve to swing for cheating justice."

The doctor turned as white as a sheet, and then with a cry of rage sprang forward, but a firm hand held him back. "Now look here, Hump Muirhead," said the

voice of Dod Hunter, "you're too free with your talk. I'd like to know what you've got against Dr. Flint and Park Willett. Nothing at all, except that they are better men than you are. You great, overgrown, hulking coward — No, I'm not afeard o' ye ; if I had been, I'd not lived your neighbor all these years. I reckon ye won't pick crows with me. I know ye too well. Now, Nancy, you say your say ; there's nothing dreadful goin' to happen." And drawing up a chair before the open door, Dod Hunter seated himself, with his rifle across his knees.

Parker Willett had been looking from one to the other in a dazed way as though he only half understood what was going on.

"He's been drugged," declared the doctor. "He will be all right after a while, Miss Agnes. Let him lie there on the bed." Agnes still stood with the child clinging to her neck, her mother's half-brother glowering at her.

"Just suppose you hand over that pistol, Hump," remarked Dod Hunter, blandly ; "it's not going to be of any use to you just now. Shucks ! man, but you do let your temper git a terrible holt on ye," as the discomfited Muirhead turned toward his neighbor with a savage grinding of his teeth, but with no movement toward giving up his pistol.

"Here, Tom," called Dod, to one of his sons, "Hump wants you to holt his pistol awhile." And the pistol

dropped to the floor with a crash, but fortunately was not discharged in the fall.

"You're dreadful keerless, Hump," Dod said smiling, "that might hev sent ye to kingdom come." And picking up the pistol he handed it to his son.

"I'll have it out of every one of you for breaking into my house," snarled Humphrey. "Here, you, what are you staring at? Take those young uns out," and he turned menacingly to his wife who retreated to the back room, the children straggling after her, all but Honey, who refused to leave the arms which held him.

"Shucks! Hump, I'd like to know if nabbing a man ain't as bad as breakin' into a house. Perhaps you'll call it quits on that," suggested Dod.

"Who said I nabbed any one?" questioned Humphrey.

"Park Willett was found bound and drugged on your premises."

"What proof have you that I did it?"

"Oh, well, when it comes to that, I suppose there isn't anything more than the fact. I suppose he might have done it himself just for fun, might have crawled in through the keyhole and tied himself up to see how it would feel."

"How do you know he is not a criminal, and that I am acting for the law?"

Dod Hunter put back his head and laughed. "That's a good un! What's he done accordin' to your idea of it?"

"He attempted my life."

"For why? I reckon most any man that's set upon at night by a passel o' ruffians is goin' to fight for his freedom, his life, and anythin' else he wants to keep. You might as well give in, Hump."

"If it's a life for a life," said Agnes, "perhaps you don't know who saved Honey from drowning and brought him back." She turned to her uncle.

"It was Jimmy O'Neill."

"It was Jimmy O'Neill who first saved him, but it was Parker Willett who rowed out when the raft was going to pieces, and who, at the risk of his own life brought Jimmy and Honey ashore, and it was he who found out where Honey belonged and brought him to Uncle Dod's."

Humphrey's head dropped.

"That's all so, Hump," Dod said. "Park's modest, and wouldn't let me tell it, but insisted on Jimmy's having all the credit."

"If I'd 'a' known that," muttered Hump—then he growled out "but he's got a forged will."

"A forged will? Who says so?"

"My father left this place to me."

"Who says that? And who has forged the will?" asked Dr. Flint.

"Them Kennedys; they hashed it up between 'em."

"They did, did they? You seem to know a great deal about it. Suppose you question Jimmy O'Neill.

I think he'd be able to tell a different tale," said Dod.

"Jimmy O'Neill?"

"Yes, it was he who brought the will to us," Agnes informed him. "Didn't Mr. Willett tell you that?" she asked.

"He told me some cock and bull story about a will being made in an Injun camp, as if anybody'd believe that."

"It is true, anyway," declared Agnes. "Have you the will?"

"No," the man growled, "the fool didn't have it, after all. He'd have been set free by night if you'd ha' let him be. I don't see why you made all this fuss."

"Well," said Dod, "there's an old sayin' about givin' a dog a bad name, ye know, an' we thought it was time Park was comin' home."

Parker, who was now sitting up with his head in his hands, looked up drowsily. Agnes went toward him. "Have you the will?" she whispered.

He shook his head. "No, I gave it to some one. I'm so sleepy I can't talk." His head dropped again.

"It is strange where it has gone, then," said Agnes, "for I know he had it when he left us; he told me so."

"Well, I ain't got it, worse luck," snapped Humphrey.

"Then it don't seem to me that there's any use our settin' around here," said Dod. "As long as Park ain't

got nothin' about him that ye want, ye'll be willin' we should take him home. Mebbe ye'd like us all to turn over any little thing we've got about us. Ye've mistaken yer callin', Hump, ye'd ought a hev ben a pirate."

Muirhead turned on him in impotent rage, but Dod only laughed in his face. "I've not done with this yet," said Humphrey. "I'll admit I ain't nothin' agin Willett, specially as he saved my boy, an' I thank him fur that act o' hisn, but I've no call to be friendly with them Kennedys."

"Your niece here took keer o' the young un like a mother, an' gave him up with tears in her eyes even when she knew he was yours."

"What's her tears to me! She'd no right to the boy; he's mine. Maybe they'll be tryin' to steal him next."

"Ah, but yer a black-hearted scoundrel, Hump Muirhead," said Dod, in wrath. "I've a mind to take a turn at givin' ye a good lambastin'. I've threatened myself to do it this many a day, an' I'd ha' done it before now if ye hadn't bore yer father's name, pore misguided lad that he was."

Humphrey's fist doubled up, but Dod faced him with a careless contempt. "Yer day o' reckonin's comin'," he went on, "an' I'm a-settin' waitin' fur it. Come, lads, we'll git out o' this. I hope the next time we're under this roof it'll be to call on Mrs. Fergus Kennedy. Walkin's the best thing to rouse Park, so

bring him along, Doc, you an' Tom." And he marched out without further ado.

At the threshold Agnes darted back to give Honey a parting kiss, and to say good-by to Mrs. Muirhead, who was shrinking away from the back door. The little woman was trembling with excitement. She held something under her apron, and after a furtive look around, she drew it forth and thrust it into Agnes's hand. "Hide it, hide it," she said in an excited whisper. "It dropped when they were bringing the man in, and I picked it up." And Agnes thrust into the bosom of her jacket the little flat box belonging to Parker Willett.

CHAPTER XIV

JEANIE'S WEDDING-DAY

BY the time they had reached the house, Parker was sufficiently aroused to be able to tell something of his adventure. He was waylaid in the woods on his way to Dod Hunter's, and was overpowered by a body of men who appeared suddenly in his path. They told him if he would come peaceably with them, that no harm would come to him. He was bound and taken to a lonely spot where they gave him something to eat and drink. After that he remembered nothing. It was supposed that he was drugged and was then carried to Humphrey Muirhead's where he was searched. The little box found by Mrs. Muirhead may or may not have been examined, and the parcel, which was brought away from his former home was left the next morning at Dod Hunter's, being discovered on the doorstep by the first one astir.

“I remember meeting some one on the river bank just as I was about to start through the woods, and I have a dim recollection that I gave him the will, but, strange to say, I cannot remember who it was or why I gave it

to him. I may not have done this, and Hump Muirhead may have it after all, but I do not know why I should be so impressed by a transaction that never occurred."

"I think when he gets over the effects of the stuff they have given him, that he will be all right," said Dr. Flint, "and I wouldn't bother him now," he told Agnes.

The girl refused to remain after they had returned to the Hunters', but after taking something to eat, she started home, being escorted safely to the river's brink by Jerry, who gave his opinion of Hump Muirhead in forcible language. "I hope to goodness he ain't got that will," he said, "for it would be purty hard work to prove its contents, and he knows it. I hope Park is right about givin' it to somebody else, but who in the mischief could it have been? Park is cautious, and it would be a shaky thing to do unless you was right certain of yer man. I reckon it'll come out all right — give us time; but it's my opinion it'll take force to git Hump outen that house, but I'll be one to use that same force."

"Ah me!" sighed Agnes, "if only people would be true and honest in this world, how much trouble it would save."

"The millennium ain't came yit," said Jerry, "but I agree with you that we could have things a bit easier if some folks would only half try. I ain't no saint, myself, but I'm open and above board, that nobody'll deny."

"I think that can safely be said of all your family," returned Agnes, as she stepped into the little skiff. "Good-by, Jerry. I hope we shall soon be nearer neighbors."

"I'll give ye my hand on that," Jerry answered, as he gave her boat a push off.

It was now late in the day, and as Agnes climbed the hilly steep, she felt the strain of the morning had told upon her, and when she came in looking fagged and pale, her mother took alarm.

"Why, my bairn," she cried, "what ails you? Has it been so serious a thing?"

"It was serious, very," Agnes responded, sinking down on the settle. "It has been an exciting day, mother. I told you the truth when I said I might be needed, for I was, but I did mislead you a little, though some one really was ill. I will tell you all about it and I think you will not blame me. I could not tell you at the time, for I had promised Uncle Dod I would not, but now, as it has come out, he thinks I should let you know." And she poured forth her tale to her mother's attentive ears.

When she had finished, her mother's face wore a startled, pained expression. "It is terrible, Agnes," she exclaimed. "What a lawless country that we have come to! I shall fear to go from the protection of Jimmy O'Neill's big fist."

"You needn't be," returned Agnes, lightly, "for there

is Uncle Dod Hunter and all his three big sons on one side and Parker Willett on the other. What chiefly concerns us now is the whereabouts of the will. I don't believe Hump Muirhead has it, for he seemed really in earnest about his disappointment in not finding it. I believe in Mr. Willett's impression that he gave it to some one, and I think he will remember who it is, so don't let us trouble ourselves just yet to say anything about it to Jimmy or Polly."

"Another thing that worries me," Mrs. Kennedy went on, "is our obligation to Mr. Willett; in trying to do us a service he has suffered, and I do not feel comfortable over it."

"Never mind, don't fash yourself; he is safe, and let us hope the will is, too. Besides, now Hump will not want to do him any further harm because of Honey; so a blessing came out of that," she added softly. "Now, mother, tell me what has been going on to-day since I left. Who has been here?"

"Your friend, Jean M'Clean, for one. She came to bid us all to her wedding. It will take place next week."

"Why, that is a month sooner than she expected."

"Yes; but Jeanie says David is persistent, and that he cannot see any reason for waiting, and as there is no real reason, they may as well be married at once."

"Then you will see a true backwoods wedding, mother, and you may expect a roystering time. David

went to Marietta on Wednesday, and I know now what was his errand. I wonder when he is coming back. He is a good David, though rather an obstinate one sometimes."

This new interest for the time being quite drove away the thought of the will. There really was nothing to be done about it for the present, and Agnes turned her attention to Jeanie.

"I must go over and see the bride that is to be," she said the next day. "I promised her my help when the wedding-day should come. It seems, mother, that you have come to a spot where there are a great many exciting things going on, and I have no doubt you thought it would be very dull. I am sorry that all these things call me, but I am always so glad to think you are here for me to come back to."

She found Jeanie going about her preparations in a most orderly manner; nothing in that household ever suggested confusion. Jeanie's chest, filled with its store of linen, stood ready to be carried to her new home. A pretty young heifer, her father's gift to her, lowed in the stable yard. Jeanie's plain stuff gown had been woven and colored with more care than usual, and her neckerchief was snowy white from long bleaching; it was, too, of finer linen than had ever been made in the community, and it was edged with a bit of lace, part of her mother's little hoard. There would be no veil and orange blossoms for this bride. She might

tuck a few spring blossoms in her dark hair, and wear a sprig at her breast, but her ornaments would be few and simple. She showed with great pride her shoes, ornamented with a pair of silver buckles, and took more pleasure in this bit of grandeur than in any other part of her wardrobe.

"They are true silver, Nancy, and the shoes we were able to get from Patty Hopkins. She brought them from home with her and her feet had outgrown them before she wore them at all. Was I not lucky to get them? Aren't they fine?"

"They are, indeed," returned Agnes, viewing the new shoes admiringly. "There are gay times ahead," she went on, "with a wedding, a housewarming, and all that. When does David come back?"

"We expect him Saturday, but he may be detained over Sabbath. There is a deal to do yet, and it is well he is not here to take up my time."

Agnes laughed. "What an unromantic speech; for my part I think I should rather have my lover's presence than so big a feast."

"Ah, but I shall have his company for the rest of my life, and a wedding-feast is but once prepared; besides, it is not for ourselves, but for our company."

"That is true, too. Well, Jeanie, it is too early yet to cook the feast, but I will be here on Monday and give you all the help I can. I have left my mother so much of late that I must hurry back now."

"Can't you stay?" said Jeanie, wistfully. "I would like to have one more talk about our girlhood before I am made a wife. There is much I have to tell and much I want to hear."

Agnes hesitated; it seemed unkind to refuse the request, yet her mother must be considered. "I promised I would not stay long," she said.

"I will send one of the children over to say that you will stay," said Jeanie, eagerly, and to this Agnes consented.

"If Archie were only here," sighed Jeanie, "my happiness would be complete, and yours, too, wouldn't it, Nancy?"

"I am very content as it is," Agnes told her. "Pray, Jeanie, don't think of Archie's ever being nearer to me than a friend. He is a dear good lad, but he will bring you a sister more worthy of his calling than I could be."

"He will bring me none that I would rather have," returned Jeanie, stoutly, "and as for the worthiness, it is but experience you need, mother says. Ah, no, Nancy, I shall not give you up yet."

But Agnes's thoughts were drifting off to the hill-side and the sunset, and she suddenly sprang to her feet. "I cannot stay, Jeanie, I really cannot. I forgot that little Fergus is ailing, and that Polly is all tired out with her soap-making. I ought to go home, but I will come again and spend a night with you. I will come to-morrow, and then we can go to meeting to-

gether and I will be here on Monday all ready to begin the day's work with you, for I can stay over Sabbath as well as not." And with this arrangement Jeanie was so well pleased that she let her friend go without further protest.

Agnes hurried along with a feeling that she must reach the hilltop before sundown, and true enough she was rewarded by a sight of a skiff drawn up on the sands, and she knew it to be Parker Willett's. She hastened her steps and found that he had caught sight of her and that he was coming to meet her.

"I am fortunate," he said as he came up, "for I might have missed you."

"I came very near staying with Jeanie. You know she is to be married next week."

"So soon? Yes, I believe I did hear something of it. Where did I hear it? There are still some things which confuse this foolish brain of mine. Well, little girl, I have still much to thank you for." He took her hands and shook them warmly. "I am very grateful. To think you took that risk for me!"

"To think you took that risk for us! It was my grandfather's will that made all the trouble; it had nothing to do with you personally."

"Yes, the will, and do you know, I am not able yet to remember whom it was that I gave the will to. It will all come back to me, Henry Flint says, and I am more and more sure that there was some reason why it

was best to give it up. I am sure it will come to light, and that it was not stolen. My little box that held the miniatures, I regret that, for it is gone."

"Oh, no, it isn't. I have it safe and sound," and she told of the circumstances by which it came into her possession.

"I am truly glad to hear that," said Parker. "Will you keep the box for me, Agnes? I think it is safer in your hands than in mine, if I am so stupid about remembering what I do with things."

"You are not to blame for forgetting, and, yes, I will keep it gladly, and may I look at the miniatures sometimes?"

"Would you like to? I am pleased that you should care to."

"I needn't be afraid of finding anything under the secret panel," said Agnes, with a glad little laugh. Then more softly, "Are you sorry that the place is empty?"

"No, I am very glad, you sweet child." He still held her hands and looked at her with so tender an expression that the girl's eyes drooped. "Alicia, you know, Alicia," he went on, "would never have joined a band of rough men and have scoured the country with them to find me. She would have been scandalized if any one had suggested such a thing."

"Was it wrong? I never thought. You see Uncle Dod was there, and I could trust him. Besides I — I —

think I would have done it, anyhow, to — to — save you.”

He gave her hands a sudden pressure, then dropped them. “Agnes Kennedy,” he said, “you dear, unspoiled child, you are certainly revealing a new and delightful side of your character. I don’t know what I shall do if you keep on showing these surprising traits.” He stepped back from her, and turned away his gaze to the river, now molten gold from the clouds overhead. “Talk of wealth,” he went on, “I am rich with a mine of pure gold so near me. Listen, Agnes, I have set myself a task. When I found that I was penniless, and when I decided that I would come to the West, it was my mother who insisted upon giving me her last dollar to start me in the world. She said it was her fault, the dear, unworldly woman who was so easily deceived by appearances, but I told her I would take it only as a loan, and I hold that I am not a free man till that is paid. It was not my mother’s fault that her second husband proved a visionary, unpractical man, and I should feel a mean-spirited wretch if I defrauded her of the little hoard she gave me so willingly. And that is why, in honor, I am not a free man, and why — and why, Agnes, little girl, I do not dare to see too much of you. But some day —” he turned and his eyes met hers, and each read the story revealed. Neither spoke a word till Agnes said faintly, “I must go home; mother will be expecting me.”

“May I go with you?”

"Oh, yes, you were going, weren't you?"

"I didn't know. I hadn't thought of whether I wanted to see anybody but — There, Agnes, let's talk of the weather — or — your mother or something."

"I want to know if you feel quite well."

"Yes, except for a buzzing in my head when I try to concentrate my thoughts, but that is passing away. How did you like Dr. Flint?"

"I thought him very interesting."

"He said you were the bravest girl he ever saw."

"Did he? He might have told me so."

"I told him he might say that to me but not to you, and that if he kept on raving about you, I would punch his head. There, Agnes, we must talk of the weather, or I am lost. Did your mother scold you very severely for chasing about in the woods all day with the Hunters?"

"No, she looked very grave at first, but she said I did right, and she was more concerned about your having suffered on our account than about anything else."

"Pshaw! I didn't exactly suffer; you can hardly call it that. I must hasten to reassure her on that point. Dare I face her and Jimmy O'Neill without the will?"

"Jimmy doesn't know but you have it still. I didn't tell any one but mother, and she thought it was best not to mention it for a few days."

"It is plain to see that you have profited by the example of a most extraordinarily considerate woman,

Agnes. How fine that sky is! We shall have good weather to-morrow."

"I am glad of that, for I promised Jeanie to spend the Sabbath with her. She has such a pretty fine neckerchief, and such fine silver buckles for her shoes, new shoes, too." Agnes looked down at her own coarse shoepacks, and Parker's eyes followed her glance. About the home place she was wont to go barefoot in mild weather, and he thought the shoepacks were scarce an improvement upon the fashion. "Would you like to have a pair of pretty shoes with silver buckles?" he asked.

"I would dearly like to have them. I suppose it isn't right to be wishing for such vanities, but I believe I like vanities."

"Almost all girls do, and if I had my way, they should all have them. I wish I were a cordwainer, Agnes, I'd then make you a pair of the daintiest shoes you ever saw." He threw back his head and laughed joyously at the thought.

"What is so funny?"

"That I should envy a shoemaker his trade, and that in this delightful locality one doesn't need money nor fine apparel to make him like other people, or to make him happy. I was suddenly impressed with the humor of it, and I laughed in sheer mockery of those misguided persons in that way-back, unenlightened land I came from, who have yet to learn that fine feathers do

not make fine birds, for the rarest, sweetest little bird I know doesn't have and doesn't need any fine feathers. Speaking of birds, it must be pleasant work building a nest. Just suppose, Agnes, for the humor of it, that we were a pair of birds, and were thinking of nest-building, would the prospect please you? There, don't answer me. I insist that it will be a fine day to-morrow. How does the garden come on? Are those beans up yet?"

Agnes laughed in reply. This nonsense was delightful. She understood it all, and could have wandered on the river's bank forever listening to the merry chatter.

They went on in silence for a little time, then Parker asked abruptly, "Do you like books, Agnes?"

"I am very fond of them, but we never had many, and I have had no time to read since I came here, even if I had had anything to read. I picked up a book of yours one day, and I read a little. I liked it."

"What was it?"

"One of the plays of Mr. Shakespeare."

"I am glad you like to read," he said thoughtfully; "we will have some pleasant times together, when the work is done, and in those long evenings—" He broke off with a start, a flush coming to his face. He laughed in an embarrassed sort of way. "I seem to forget that I am no longer a member of your household, don't I? But I have a few books with me, and you

can read them and tell me afterward what you think of them."

"I shall like that when the winter comes, and we have such long evenings, but then comes the spinning, and all that, but I shall get some time, I hope. We should be in our own home by that time, don't you think so?"

"I think you should be there before then if there's any justice in the land, but I am shirking my duty. I must go and tell your mother that I don't know anything about that will. Come, Agnes, and give me countenance."

The will was still unaccounted for on the morning of Jeanie's wedding-day, and Mrs. Kennedy felt an anxiety that she did not express, though Agnes was so absorbed in the exciting prospect of the day's pleasure that she gave no thought to it. It was the ordinary custom for the bridal procession to form at the home of the groom's father and from thence to escort him to the home of the bride, but David's parents were not living, and the lad had his own home, so thither the guests repaired, only to find the house closed and barred. The men stared, the girls nudged each other. What was wrong? Had the groom deserted his lady-love? Was he playing a trick? Was he so shy that he had stolen a march upon them, and was now in advance of them making his way to Jeanie's house? All these conjectures were fairly discussed, but there seemed to be no satisfactory solution.

"There hasn't ben no weddin' sence Dave come among us," at last Jerry Hunter remarked, "and maybe he didn't exactly understand our ways. I say we go on without him, and like as not we'll find him there. We ain't goin' to break up the weddin' on his account; it's likely he thought he'd make the trip alone. Who see him last?"

Each looked at the other. No one seemed able to say. David had not appeared at meeting on the previous Sabbath, and it was known that he had started for Marietta some days before that; further than this there seemed nothing definite to be learned.

Two by two the cavalcade set forth through the woods, now beginning to show a sparse leafage brought suddenly out by a day of warmth. Gay was the little company, for fun was the leading purpose of the hour. Some tricksters having started on ahead, an unexpected volley of musketry from an ambuscade gave cause for much plunging of horses, many shrieks from the lasses, and much uproarious laughter after the smoke had cleared away. There was no road save the bridle-path, and that none too good, but the roughly dressed company cared little for that, and, indeed, the more obstacles in the way of fallen trees or ragged grape-vines the better the fun. Clad in leathern breeches, stout leggings, linsey hunting-shirts, the men were a picturesque crew, while the lasses in their linsey-woolsey gowns rarely boasted an ornament unless it might be such as a few

could show in the way of heirlooms like buckles or lace ruffles.

Arrived at last the riders tied up their horses, and all trooped into the house where the bride and her friends awaited the coming of the groom.

Jerry Hunter as leader entered first, and gave a sharp glance around the room. "Where's Davy?" he blurted out.

Mrs. M'Clean's cheek turned suddenly pale, and her husband cast a keen glance toward the door. "None o' yer joking," he said sternly.

"I'm not jokin', as I'm a sinner," returned Jerry. "Am I, boys? Isn't Dave here?"

"No." The word came sharp from the father's lips.

His wife gave him an appealing look. "I hope nothing has happened to the lad," she said in a troubled voice. "Ye've not seen him the morn, Jerry?"

"No, nor have any of us."

"He was no at meeting on Sabbath day," said the minister, gravely, as he came forward, "and he was sure to be home by then, he told me."

"And not later than yesterday," said Mrs. M'Clean. She slipped from the room to where Jeanie, surrounded by her girl friends, was waiting. At the pitying look on her mother's face she sprang to her feet. "Mother, what's happened to David?" she cried.

"Naught that we know of, lass, but he's not come."

Agnes pressed close and sought Jeanie's hand. "He

will come, Jeanie," she whispered. The other girls looked at one another, one or two with a faintly significant smile. Agnes was quick to see them. "He will come," she said with assurance; "something has happened to detain him a little. David was always one to keep his word." She nodded her head decidedly at those who had smiled. "Don't fret, Jean," said one of the other girls.

"Fret? Why should I fret?" she asked, holding up her head. "I know that David is as true as steel, and if mishap has overtaken him, it is no fault of his. We can wait awhile, mother. Tell the company we will wait awhile."

Mrs. M'Clean returned to the front room. The gossips were whispering together; most of the men had strolled out and were standing in knots outside, looking stern disapprobation, for a man to be behindhand on his wedding-day did not augur well. Time sped on. It would be an unprecedented thing if the wedding were not to take place before noon, and the waiting company watched the sun as it mounted high in the heavens, and still no David appeared.

"Puir lass," sighed one good wife to another, "widowed before she's a wife."

"Or worse, deserted at the very altar. She'll not hold her head up after this; she's a proud lass, is Jean M'Clean."

In the back room Jean sat. She, too, was watching

the sun climbing so surely and steadily toward the zenith. At the noontide hour she arose to her feet, her face white and drawn. "Leave me, friends," she said. "There'll be no wedding to-day. I am sorry to disappoint you. Leave me, please."

They all filed out, casting compassionate looks upon her. Agnes alone refused to leave. "Oh, Jeanie dear," she whispered, "out of evils sometimes comes a blessing. I have known it so. Don't give up, dear heart."

Jeanie turned from her and clasped her hands, then with groping steps strove to reach the door; at the threshold she stopped. "I can't—I can't face them all," she cried. "Tell my mother."

"Hark!" exclaimed Agnes. There was the sound of flying hoofs — beat, beat, — along the road. With one spring Jeanie reached the window and pulled back the curtain. "It's David!" she cried. "It's David, my lad!" and then all trembling she sank down, sobbing out her joy.

CHAPTER XV

WHO HAD THE WILL

IT was, without doubt, David who was coming pounding along the path up from the woods, and who, dusty and travel-stained, drew up his reeking horse before the door. The men gathered closely about him, the women craned their necks from the door. "What is the matter, Davy, lad? What kept ye, Dáve? Are ye ill, lad? Look at the hoss, he's near spent," were some of the various remarks made, as David, elbowing his way through the crowd, entered the house. He answered no questions, but made straight for Mrs. M'Clean. "Where's Jeanie?" he asked hurriedly, and following her glance he went toward the door of the next room, paused not to knock, but entered forthwith.

Jeanie, the tears still standing in her eyes, was waiting. David held out his two hands. "Am I too late, lass? It's not my fault. I beeta get here long ago, but it's a tale I must tell later. I am safe now, but am I too late? Will ye turn me off for being behind-hand? Do you doubt me?"

"Not I, David," said Jeanie, giving him her hands. "I'm thankful you've come to no mishap. I never doubted you, but I feared ill had befallen you."

"Will ye tak me as I am, dusty an' worn with travel? I've come *forty mile* the morn. Will ye listen to me tale now, or will ye stand up wi' me before the meenister so?" David was lapsing into the dialect of his childhood, in his excitement.

"Ay, David, I will marry you first, and hear the tale after. It's not too late; the sun was at noon but half an hour ago, and the company will be glad not to miss the wedding."

He took her by the hand, and led her into the next room. The guests fell back into their places, whispering, nudging, wondering. In consideration of the feast awaiting, and in view of the curiosity which pervaded the entire party, the minister's harangue was not so lengthy as usual, and the two standing before him were wedded in short order, but in the prayer there were fewer allusions to the wife's being in obedience to her husband, and more expressions of thankfulness than were commonly spoken; the good pastor evidently felt that the young man had escaped disaster, and did not hesitate to say so.

The final blessing had hardly been pronounced when the curious friends crowded around. "Yer story, David; ye promised it."

"Tut, tut!" cried Polly O'Neill, "an' where are yer

good wishes? Ye're that ongracious, all o' ye, that ye'd leave the bride an' groom wid no congratulatoryns at all. Here's good health to ye, Mr. an' Mrs. David Campbell, an' may ye have thumpin' luck."

Then came a merry effort from each to outdo the others in getting a hand-shake, a kiss from the bride, and a chance to offer good wishes, the minister standing by in his blacks, a serious smile upon his kind, weather-beaten face. The girls laughing, pushing, exclaiming, exchanging jokes with the young men, were first to throw themselves upon the bride's neck, after she had received the kisses of her father and mother; and then the young men must kiss the bride, too; and the more saucy damsels challenged the groom for a like exchange. So for a time there was much merry-making and laughter.

When the last good wish had been spoken, the minister turned to the company. "My friends," he said, "I think David has something to say to us, and if ye will all take orderly places, we shall hear it."

David, blushing up to the roots of his hair, stood awkwardly facing the guests. "My friends," he began, "I owe my excuses to ye for keeping ye waiting, but when I tell ye how it came about, I think ye'll say it was no because I lacked the wish to get here." He paused and looked around for encouragement.

"Ay, David," said the minister, "nae one doubts the desire."

David continued. "This morning at daybreak I was forty miles away from here. I left Maxwell's yesterday morn, expecting to get here by sundown, but after I'd gone a mile I remembered something I had forgotten and turned back. A quarter mile further on, from the bushes sprang two men, one grabbed the bridle, the other covered me with his pistol.

"‘Get off, peaceably,’ he says, ‘and ye’ll have no harm done ye.’ I felt for me knife, but it was yorked out of my hand, and knowing I’d not time for many hours’ delay, down I got. ‘Ye’re on the way to Maxwell’s,’ said one of the villyuns.

"‘What’s that to you?’ said I.

"‘It’s a good bit to me,’ he said, ‘if ye were coming away.’ He looked at me, threatening like, and I made haste to say, ‘I’m going there,’ though I was both going and coming, and had been before.

"‘We’re not too late, then,’ said the other fellow. ‘Hand over every paper about ye, and we’ll let ye go.’”

A sharp exclamation came from Parker Willett standing near the door.

David paid no heed to it but went on. "I’d no mind to do that, and I refused. With that the two fell on me, and we’d a fight of it, but being two against one, at last they got me down and tied me hand and foot; then they went through my pockets, my pouch, my saddlebags, and even took the shoes from my feet; but they didn’t find what they wanted.

"May I ask," says I, 'what ye're looking for; and maybe I can help ye, for I've no time to lose.'

"'We're looking for a will, a forged will,' said one.

"'I've no forged will,' said I, 'nor ever did have, and if ye're looking for the will of old man Muirhead, ye can spare yerself the trouble, for you're too late by three days. It's in the magistrate's hands by this time, and I'm glad of it.' Then one of them hit me a lick, and told me not to be so free with my opinions. 'Ye said ye were going to Maxwell's,' he said.

"'I did,' said I.

"'Then how can ye have placed it in the hands of the law?' says he. 'Because,' I gave him answer, 'I've already come from Maxwell's this morning, and had but turned to go back for a bit of something I forgot.' The man gave a kick. 'You're a deceitful, lyin' fool,' said he.

"I reminded him what the Bible says of them that call others fools, but he glowered at me and says, 'I don't half believe ye. We know ye did have the will, for Park Willett was seen to give it to ye down by Locke's ford.'

"'Whatever Park Willett's given me,' I said, 'I've not now, and I'll never have again, so you'll let me up and I'll go on.' With that the one that did the most talking gave me another kick, and if I ever get my two hands on him, the lambastin' I'll give him —"

There were growls of approval from David's friends,

but the minister's voice came in: "Go on, David. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord!'"

David composed himself, and went on with his story. "'To-morrow is my wedding-day, men,' said I, 'and you'll let me up or the country won't be big enough for ye when I'm free,' but they only laughed at me, and first thing I knew I was alone, not able to move hand or foot, and they'd gone from sight."

A dozen hands sought their hunting-knives in their excitement. "Who were the men? Did ye ever see them before?" said one. "We'll settle their hash once we find them."

"I never saw them before, and I want to see them just once again," returned David.

"But how did you get away?" came the question from half a dozen.

"I lay there till nearly dawn this morning, working at the straps that bound me; finally I managed to get the leg straps loose and got to my feet. My horse was willing enough to be caught and to follow me to Maxwell's, for I was that stiff I could not mount him." He did not say with what effort the walk was made after the long restraint. "There I got my hands freed, had some breakfast, fed my horse, and started for home as hard as I could gallop. If Donald had dropped, I would have footed it, but he held out, and here I am."

It was the longest speech David had ever made, and it made its impression, following so closely as it did

upon Parker's adventure. The indignation of the men was roused to the uttermost. "We'll h'ist Hump; he's got to get out of here; it's all his doings," they cried. "It'll be too hot for him, he'll find. Those men wanted to get a chance to make tracks was why they left ye there alone, David; they didn't want ye to trace 'em."

Parker made his way over to Agnes. "It was David I gave the will to, I remember all about it; it all came back to me as soon as he began his story. I remember that, as I was passing Locke's ford, he came by and told me he was going to Marietta; it struck me that here was a chance to send the will, and that I could not have a safer messenger. So I concluded that I would make a copy and show that to Hump Muirhead. I had a bit of paper with me that I could use, and the writing of it did not take a moment. I put it in the sliding panel of the little box for safe-keeping. Have you looked to see if there is anything there?"

"No," Agnes replied; "I supposed it was empty. I am so sorry for poor David; he has had a deal of worryment. What a lot of trouble that will has made!"

"So much the better, for it will prove its genuineness. Nobody would make such a fuss over a worthless piece of paper, and it is evident that Hump Muirhead considers it important. I am glad that it is in proper hands and that your interests are secure. Hump Muirhead could not have chosen a surer way to rid the settlement of his very undesirable self, for not one

of these men will stand such outrages, and we will hunt him out of the neighborhood."

"He deserves it," Agnes replied. "Poor Jeanie! it was so dreadful to have her wedding-day so nearly a day of grief and sorrow. If David had not been able to free himself, he might still have been lying there, and have died of cold and hunger; that is terrible to think of."

In a few minutes the dinner was ready and a mighty feast it was. The plain table of hewn boards bore no fine damask, but it held a plentiful supply of roast pork, venison, and wild turkey; game pies were flanked by plenty of potatoes and hominy, and there were puddings, pies, and preserves to end up with, so that the company arose well satisfied, keen as their appetites were.

There followed a boisterous scene, when every one seemed to make an effort to be as noisy as possible and to outdo his neighbor in merry-making. In the lively games Polly was usually leader, and her jokes and quips evoked the heartiest laughter. She seemed determined that the discomfort of the early part of the day should be lost in rollicking fun, and that the wedding should be remembered as the gayest in the neighborhood. When the fun became too fast and furious, Agnes sought her mother's side, and after a while Parker Willett made his way over to where the two were sitting. "It is a lively scene," he remarked to

Mrs. Kennedy. "I don't suppose you ever saw anything just like it before."

"Not just like it, although we have had some noisy times at weddings in our own neighborhood, but there is a mixture here of our own customs and of those of the backwoodsmen."

It was about ten o'clock that Polly came up and whispered to Mrs. Kennedy, "Where has Agnes gone?"

Mrs. Kennedy smiled. "She has slipped off to join the girls who are stealing the bride away to her room. Did you want her specially, Polly?"

"Oh, no; I did but think to ask her to have an eye on the babies when she has a chance."

"I looked in upon them not long ago and they were all asleep, sound enough, in spite of the noise. I suppose," she turned to Park Willett as Polly walked away satisfied, "that we shall have a repetition of this at the housewarming."

"Yes, it is much the same thing at all the festivities. It was a curious thing about the will, Mrs. Kennedy. I suppose the court will appoint an executor, but it will be some time before you gain possession of your property, unless the friends of David succeed in running the present occupant off."

"I am sorry for his wife and children," Mrs. Kennedy returned sorrowfully.

"They are the only ones to be pitied, but the chil-

dren will not be long in adopting a new home, and Mrs. Muirhead could not be much lonelier or much harder worked than she is now."

"I should like to see her and the children."

"I will tell her; she seems greatly pleased by any notice taken of her or the children. Your husband tells me that you are putting up two more rooms."

"Yes, he and Jimmy are working hard over the addition. It will be much more comfortable; the space is too small for two families."

"Your husband improves. Your coming did him good."

"Do you think so?" Mrs. Kennedy was wistful. "I have hoped against hope, yet I do think there is a little change for the better. He seems to notice little things more than he did, and has become very fond of the baby whom he at last accepts as our own. I think it is good for him to have youth and brightness about him. The children do not seem to trouble him, and I see him and the boys carrying on long conversations together."

"I am glad to hear that; it promises well." He suddenly stopped speaking, and Mrs. Kennedy saw that he had caught sight of Agnes, who had just reappeared with a bevy of girls. She noticed that Agnes met his glance and that a soft flush flew to the girl's cheek.

"One wedding often follows another. Example is

a great thing," said a voice at her side. "I suppose, Mrs. Kennedy, that your little lass will soon be leaving you."

"Scarcely yet," replied the mother. "I hope I shall keep her by me for many a day, Mrs. Scott."

"It's Archie M'Clean, they say," ventured Mrs. Scott, "though for my part, I think it will be some one else." She gave a comprehensive nod toward the young man standing near Mrs. Kennedy.

"Marriage is not in the mind of my lassie," Mrs. Kennedy returned with some dignity. "She has been away from her mother for so long that she is content to bide at home with her now." Agnes now rejoined her mother who shared her stool with her. Seats were scarce, and many of the lads thought it no discourtesy to offer their laps for the convenience of the lassies, and the offer was taken in good part and generally accepted. Agnes preferred to share her mother's three-legged stool, and sat there contentedly.

"Are you dull, dear mother?" she whispered.

"No, I am vastly entertained. This exhibit of backwoods manners amuses me greatly; it is quite beyond my comprehension, yet they are all good people. I thought we at home were far removed from city ways, but this is surprising." She found herself turning to Parker Willett. "It is strange what a press of necessity will bring about, and how soon one becomes used to things which at first seem shocking. I doubt not another generation will forget gentle ways entirely."

"Another and some succeeding ones, but as the population increases more gentleness will leaven society out here. Ceremonies come to be useless things where one must battle with the conditions which exist in a new settlement; there is not time for them. Yet when one considers that we are not the real pioneers and what risks were run by those first intrepid leaders, and what privations they endured, ours of fifty years later seems a great gain. We have escaped those bloody wars that the advance-guard fought for us, and feel that we have been outdone in courage by those who first dared to cross the mountains to open up this Western Range."

"My father was one of them," said Mrs. Kennedy, sadly.

"Yes, and we should be proud of him. You should hold up your head at being the daughter of so brave a pioneer. Putnam's colony—those sturdy New Englanders—seems to be doing well; they put a deal of energy into what they do, and are developing the country wonderfully; the Muskingum colony thrives and we shall soon be no longer in a wilderness, Mrs. Kennedy."

"You say that for encouragement."

"No, I say it from my own conviction. Are you tired of all this? Would you like to slip off into a quieter place? We can't go home till morning, you know, and they will keep this up till daybreak. I will make way for you, if you care to go somewhere else." He shouldered his way past the merrymakers, and

Agnes followed. They passed out into the lean-to, and from thence into one of the outbuildings where stood the loom, and which was known as the weaving room. "I discovered this safe retreat some time ago," said Parker. "I know where there is a pile of sheepskins ; I will get some, and you two can lie down and take a rest." He disappeared and soon returned with the skins which he threw on the floor. There was no light in the room save such as came from the moonlight which shone through the small window, but it was not needed by the mother and daughter who lay down side by side, glad of an opportunity of taking a longed-for rest, while Parker locked the door on them.

Sandy and the other boys of his size had taken refuge in the stable ; the smaller children were huddled together in one of the rooms indoors, for their mothers were obliged to bring them or to stay at home from the wedding, a thing not to be thought of.

Up and down in the moonlight paced Parker, keeping watch while Agnes and her mother slept. It was against all custom to allow any one to escape for the purpose of taking a nap, and he knew that the two would be hunted up as soon as they were missed, but he determined that they should not be disturbed if he could help it, and when a mischievous searcher came prowling around, he succeeded in eluding detection till they had tried the door and, finding it fast, had returned to the house.

At early dawn the sound of the boisterous fun was still to be heard, but with the daylight, the procession was ready to form again, and the revellers returned to their several homes. David's prolonged absence had prevented the putting of his cabin in complete order for his bride, but the housewarming was soon to be, and the day after it Jeanie would move to her new home.

Polly, jaded and fagged out, could do nothing but sleep the day after the wedding, and, indeed, there were few in the community who felt like attending with much spirit to their accustomed duties, and only the older people, who had been excused from sitting up all night, were feeling bright and fresh.

"We are lucky in not having two or three days of it," said Parker, as he parted with Agnes and her mother; "we're let off well this time, because of the M'Cleans' desire in the matter, but if you ever go to Jerry Hunter's wedding, for instance, I promise you that the frolic will keep up for nearly a week. We don't often get a chance to do this sort of thing, and when we do, it seems as if we didn't know when to stop. You will not forget, all of you, that you are to come over and have supper with me as soon as my place is in order, so hold yourselves in readiness."

"Don't go till you have looked at the little box," said Agnes, as he was departing.

"I will wait for you under the sycamore," he said, as she ran in to get it.

The girl was not slow in returning and in giving the box into Parker's hands. He touched the spring and the panel slid back; the compartment was empty. "Humph!" exclaimed Parker. "I wonder what that means! What will Hump Muirhead be up to next?" He shut the slide thoughtfully and handed the box back to Agnes, but there was a puzzled look on his face. "Some one found that copy of the will. I wonder who. We must find out, though it is really of no consequence now, since the true one is safe. Now that they are both out of our possession, we ought to expect no more trouble. I think I'll hunt up Hump and hear what he has to say. He evidently set those men on David's track, although I don't see why he thought David had the will if I had it. The plot thickens. I'll talk to Dod about it, but don't bother your head over it, little girl, for all you have to do is to wait till you are free to move into your own home. If I learn anything of importance, I'll let you know." He mounted his horse and rode off, a thoughtful look upon his face.

CHAPTER XVI

A SUPPER AT PARKER WILLETTS

THE summer had come upon them before Parker was ready to issue his invitation for his friends to come to take supper with him in his little shanty, for being very comfortable at Dod Hunter's, and being in no hurry to exchange hearty, cheerful society for utter loneliness, the young man set to work to prepare his garden and plant his corn-field before he should occupy his cabin. Agnes had seen him but once or twice since the wedding, but she had little time to fret over it, for with so many little mouths to feed there was plenty for her to do, and she was too weary at night to lie awake long indulging in girlish dreams. Dod Hunter, as nearest neighbor and oldest friend of Mrs. Kennedy's father, had been appointed executor, and probably no better choice could have been made. The disappearance of the copy of the will still remained a mystery over which all interested were puzzled.

It was June before Parker appeared to bid his friends to his modest attempt at a housewarming. "This is to be strictly a party for ladies," he said, laughing, to

Jimmy O'Neill, "and when I set up for a householder and a benedict, I'll have a real housewarming. My one room will hardly accommodate all my friends."

"Fergus and me'll stay at home and look after the young uns," Jimmy agreed cheerfully, "an' let the women folk have their frolic. But ye'll be enlargin' yer borders an' takin' a wife before a year," he added with a sly smile. "Have ye heerd no more o' Hump Muirhead?"

"Not I; he hasn't troubled me and I haven't troubled him. Dod assured me that he was able to attend to his business as executor, and I therefore gracefully retired from the case. Of course the court will give him a reasonable time to get out, and though he's no coward in most directions, he's well aware of the attitude of the neighbors toward him and he'll not be swaggering around much. You and Mr. Kennedy will be coming over to my clearing, Jimmy, and I'll promise you as fine a johnny-cake as you ever ate at home."

"We'll come," Jimmy answered, "after the women folk have had their time. Ay lad, but it's buildin' up the country is since the Injuns have come to terms, and we've the treaty of Greenville. The Range is fillin' up, the Reserve north av us is like to see good times, and the Ohio Company south is runnin' 'em close. We are in the thick av the immigration. I heerd, the time I went up to Marietta, that nigh twenty thousand had come along in the past year, and it's towns they'll be

showin' soon. Look at Marietta with her streets an' her churches an' a flock o' people roamin' about. We've got close to ceevilization, Mr. Willett. No more standin' wid a musket in wan hand whilst ye plant yer corn wid the other."

"That's all very true, Jimmy; I am impressed by it every time I come this way. I realize that our own little township is growing by the number of new faces I meet on the road."

"Thru for ye. Weel, 'it takes nae butter off my bannock' to have them comin,' for they open up the country, and the more the merrier." He turned back to his forge, and Parker walked toward the house where he found Mrs. Kennedy busily sewing. Agnes was helping Polly at the dye-kettle; Margret, with the children around her, was playing school under the trees. Mr. Kennedy was at work in the garden, for, though this was considered the women's province, since Jimmy's arrival it had fallen to Fergus's share.

It was a pleasant, busy scene and showed thrift and content and peace. In a sty back of the house grunted a sow and her young pigs; Agnes's chickens crooned their sleepy song with much content among the dust-heaps which they sought out; a swarm of wild bees which Polly had hived, now quite at home, were droning about the garden beds. Two new rooms having been added, one above and one below, there was now sufficient space to house the two families comfortably.

Jimmy had set up his forge and the place was frequented by those neighbors who had not a like convenience upon their own clearings, and it was quite a gathering-place for news-gatherers, though the clearings lay closer together around the little log church.

Mrs. Kennedy looked up with a smiling welcome, but she did not stop her swift stitches. "Good morning, stranger," she said.

"I am something of a stranger," the young man replied, coming in, "but it is not of choice that I am so, Mrs. Kennedy. I have come over to ask if you and Polly and Agnes will honor my little cabin this afternoon and take that long-promised supper with me. Jimmy says he and your husband will look after the children."

"Yes? That is kind of Jimmy. They will be no trouble, however, for they are always good with Margret."

"Where is Polly?"

"She and Agnes are at the dye-kettle. It seemed a fine day for the work. They are around at the back of the house."

"I think I could find them without trouble," said Parker, smiling, as Polly's laugh smote his ear. Polly was always merry over the dye-kettle. "You'll come this evening, Mrs. Kennedy?"

"Gladly. I have never crossed the river, you know."

"It is not much of a journey if one rows over from

this side ; sometimes, though, I find it easier to come by the ford. I think if you row over and I meet you with horses on the other side, it will be the best way. It will be bright moonlight coming back, and you need not be afraid even if you do hear uncanny noises."

"I shall know what they are. I am getting quite used to the sound of wolves and wildcats."

"I will go and make my request to Polly, then."

Guided by the peals of laughter, Parker took his way toward the back of the house where Polly was chasing Agnes around with threatening blued hands. "Once I get me hands on that red poll, I'll make it purple," she was crying, and Agnes was laughingly defying her with the big stick she had been using to stir the dye.

"I will surely give you a taste of this, Polly, if you come a step nearer," she was saying.

"You romping children," cried Parker. "Will you cease your play for a moment and speak to me?"

Polly advanced holding out her blue-stained hand. "I'll be glad to shake hands with ye, Mr. Willett," she declared, and laughed with glee as he backed off.

"Polly is so reckless, and she calls my hair red, Mr. Willett," Agnes complained.

"It's nearer that than anything else ; ye wouldn't call it black, would ye?" Polly asked.

"No, but mother calls it auburn, and that has a nice sound."

"Go 'long wid ye," cried Polly, "wid yer fancy names. Weel, Mr. Willett, yer no fashin' yersel' about us, these days, it's clear."

"It's not what one desires in this world, but what he finds time to do, Polly. To prove that I've been thinking of you I have come over to ask you all to sup with me."

Polly looked at her stained hands. "They're a pretty looking pair for a party," she declared.

"It's no party; it is only for a very select and chosen few — yourself, Mrs. Kennedy, and Agnes. Will the dyeing be finished in time for you to come over this afternoon?"

"Why will it not? I'll stop now." She lifted the boiling dye from the fire, and with two sticks raised the pieces of cloth from the hot liquid, flinging them into a tub near by. "They're weel enow colored," she decided, "and I'll finish up gin dinner-time. I've no gloves, Mr. Willett, an' I'll not get back the color of me hands afore the week's out. Gin Sabbath day they beeta look better. Will ye have me so? I can never do a bit of dyeing, but I must give me hands the color of me goods, be it butternut, blue, or yellow. Agnes, there, gets but the tips of her fingers in, and is nigh greetin' at that, so I threatened to give her hair the same color."

"Be done, Polly," cried Agnes, as Polly advanced upon her again, "I'll not help you with the dyeing if

you treat me so. Do be quiet. If you stop now, when will I get my linen dyed?"

"You'll get it gin Tibb's eve," returned Polly, "if ye fa' out wi' me now."

"Ah, but Polly —"

"Go long into the house wid ye, ye two, an' I'll finish up. Ye might be gittin' the vegetables for dinner, Nancy, an' I'll come make a puddin'. I beeta be makin' one in honor of the stranger."

"You'd better not be giving me too good a dinner," said Parker, "or you'll be putting my supper to shame."

"No fear o' that. In wid ye." She brandished her stick, and the two departed to the garden to gather such early vegetables as they might find ready for use.

"It's been a long time since I saw you," said Parker, speaking his thought.

"Yes?" Agnes was well aware of it, and was disposed to be a little distant in consequence, though she well knew his reason for absenting himself. "I have been busy, too, and I have been two or three times to see Jeanie. The last mail brought good news from Archie; he is hard at work and hopes by diligence to complete his course in a less time than we at first thought he could. He wrote me quite a long letter; he really can write more freely than he can talk." She looked serenely unconscious as Parker stole a glance at her.

"I suppose you were delighted to hear from him?"



PARKER WATCHED HER FOR A FEW MINUTES, NOT ATTEMPTING TO HELP.

"Oh, yes. Who wouldn't be glad to hear from an old friend? You would be, wouldn't you, to hear from Alicia, for example?"

"Agnes!" His voice was reproachful. "I didn't think you were a coquette."

The flush which dyed Agnes's cheek was caused by both wrath and contrition. "I don't see what cause you have to say that," she replied lightly. "You know perfectly well how it is with Archie and me. I shall probably marry him if I find no one more likable before he returns."

"More likable? No, I didn't know that. You didn't tell me before. And Archie is very likable?"

"Yes, very; and so good and constant and thoughtful of pleasing me. He never neglected me in his life."

"You have a very good opinion of him."

"There is no one quite like Archie." Agnes was picking her peas without proper regard to the fulness of their pods, her blue-tipped fingers slipping in and out among the vines swiftly. Parker watched her for a few minutes, not attempting to help. When he spoke again, it was in a constrained tone. "Shall you care to come over with your mother and Polly to sup with me?"

Agnes's heart had leaped at the prospect, but she said indifferently: "Oh, yes, I'd enjoy going anywhere with mother. There, I think I have enough of these. I must take them in and shell them." She picked up her rudely made basket, but Parker took it from her, as

a matter of course. He was singularly silent, and the tears smarted in Agnes's eyes. Why had she been so contrary? What had possessed her to mislead him? The beautiful bright summer day would be spoiled because of her unreasonableness. But she was too proud to alter the state of things by making advances, and they entered the house with no attempt on either side toward a better understanding, and neither one was in a very happy frame of mind.

Polly had left her dye-kettle and was deep in the mystery of the pudding she had promised to make. Agnes called on the children to shell the peas, and gave her own attention to some other things. Mrs. Kennedy, meanwhile, was preparing a pair of fowls, and Parker left them in the midst of their dinner-getting and strolled down to the forge. Agnes saw him depart. Why had things gone wrong? They might now have been sitting together over the basket of peas in happy converse. They had often shared such a piece of work. It did not add to her comfort to be aware that it was all her own fault. The unusually sumptuous dinner meant nothing to her, and she scarcely touched it.

"Nancy is saving up her appetite for this evening," said Polly, laughing. "You'd better not be too sure of what you'll get at a bachelor's, Nancy."

Parker smiled. "I can't promise you such a feast as this, Polly, though you know you are pledged to do the cooking. I can make good corn-pone and hoe-cake,

and I can cook a fish or a bit of bacon, but I am not very skilful, I warn you."

"It seems like old times to see him settin' there," said Polly. "I declare, Park, I never knew how much I missed ye till I see ye back agen."

"That is certainly complimentary, and I appreciate it. I am being treated with the fat of the land. I am afraid from the spread you have here that you have robbed the family of a week's provender; you know I am very well acquainted with the resources of the place."

"Ah but, 'it's nae loss what ye gie a freen', as the old saying is, and ye need think nae more of it." Polly was in high spirits. The prospect of any kind of frolic always put her in the best of humors.

The dinner over, Parker took his departure, and his invited guests set out in due time to meet him on the other side of the river. The days were now so long that there was no fear of their being belated in getting back, and a short stay was not to be thought of when one went out to supper; it meant the whole afternoon and the evening too, if possible. Polly was full of her quips and jokes, and pulled lustily across the stream, but she sobered down when she got across. "Ye'll not be far from yer ain, Mrs. Kennedy," she said, "for Parker's got the land next yer father's, an' ye'll be seein' what it's like. I'll be bound Hump'll look glum as a mustard-pot when he gets his summons to quit. I'll

miss ye all, but I'll be glad when ye come to yer ain. Here we are and here's Park."

Parker came forward with two horses. "How shall we travel?" he asked. "Shall I take you, Mrs. Kennedy?"

But Polly spoke up. "I've bespoke her, and ye'll be takin' Agnes. Come, Mrs. Kennedy, up behind me," and Agnes found herself starting off with Parker, her arm about his waist.

The way was not very long, and it should have been rarely pleasant to be riding through the leafy woods this summer afternoon, tall trees about them, and the air sweet with the smell of the grape blossoms, yet it was Polly who did most of the talking. Parker rarely spoke. Once his hand touched Agnes's fingers, resting lightly upon his belt, but he withdrew from the contact as if it hurt him. It was of the most indifferent things that the two young persons spoke, when they spoke at all, and the girl felt that she would have been happier with Polly or her mother.

Before the door of the small cabin the horses at last stopped. The woods came close about the small dwelling, for it takes time to fell trees, and though the clearing for the corn-field and the garden had been made, the space seemed small in the midst of the limitless forest, and so small, so lonely seemed the little cabin set there in a wilderness, that one wondered how a man could be content to make it his abode.

"Welcome to my hut," said Parker, bowing Mrs. Kennedy in. Polly followed and Agnes came last. The girl gave an exclamation of surprise and pleasure as she entered the room. It showed only the barest necessities in the way of furnishings, but the walls were festooned with vines, and upon the table stood a huge bowl of swamp magnolias. Heaped high at one end upon large leaves were ripe strawberries, and at the other were cherries as brightly red. Around the table was twisted a grape-vine, and each rough stool was covered with a piece of fringed deerskin.

Polly looked about her in surprise. "Who'd ha' thought a man would ha' done all this; it looks like a woman's work, an' a kind that we don't see about here. I've niver seen the beat, even at a weddin'. How'd you get a holt o' them cherries?"

"They came from Dod Hunter's, and the strawberries, too," Parker told her.

"It surely is very tasteful," said Mrs. Kennedy. "You are very poetical I should think, Mr. Willett. You have honored us very much by taking all this trouble, yet I know it was a pleasure, too. How sweet those magnolias are! There is not any perfume equal to theirs."

Fresh fish and venison were considered enough in the way of meats, and Polly proceeded to make some of her famous bannocks to match Parker's corn-pone, and the two waxed very merry over their competition.

Once in a while Agnes stole a look at her host, but though he was courteously polite, there was no answering glance to hers. It thrilled the girl to be beneath this roof that must now shelter the man who had grown so dear to her; to see there his rifle and shot pouch hanging on two buck horns, his hunting-shirts on pegs by the ladder which led aloft, the little row of his precious books upon a shelf on the rough wall, his silver drinking-cup full of wild flowers on the high mantel-shelf; all these things so distinctly personal, so associated with his daily life. She bit her lip, and her eyes filled with tears as she realized that by her own wilfulness she had lost half the delight of this June day. What could she say to make him understand her girlish pettishness? How could she undo the impression she had given him? There was no excuse she could offer that would seem adequate. She could not tell him that in a fit of mere foolish annoyance at his prolonged absence she had chosen to deceive him with regard to her relations with Archie. How courteous he was; with what deference he waited on her mother; how anxious he was for the comfort of his guests—he had planned this for their pleasure and she had made it but a bitter trial for herself.

“Shall you put a good crop in?” said the practical Polly, looking interestedly toward the corn-field, and addressing Parker.

“I hope to have enough; it does not take much to

feed one man and his horse. ' I do not know all I ought about farming, but I am willing to learn, and I think I shall get along."

"It's well enough to have yer manger full," Polly returned. "Ah, these are aisy times, Nancy, to those we had when no man durst go out alone to plant or hoe, and when working parties had to have their sentries armed and watchful of the Injuns. Manny a time their men have scuttled in from the fields, and manny a time has my Jimmy gone out with half a dozen others to guard some foolhardy man back to the fort who had trusted to his own two legs to get away, and would have been scalped in sight of his own house if it hadn't been for his more cautious neighbors."

"And I suppose those same men were ready to fly in the face of Providence again at the first chance, and would go out by themselves to their fields, trusting to luck to get back safe."

"Yes, an' if they didn't happen to get ketched, they'd boast of how much bigger crops they had than anybody else. I never felt in peace mesel' till Wayne's treaty."

"Yet you wouldn't leave the first settlement till you had to," Agnes reminded her.

"We all have our follies," Polly replied calmly. "Yer no done bein' foolish yersel', Nancy." A remark which Agnes at that moment silently indorsed.

The supper over and the table cleared, Parker took from the shelf his flute, and played for them many

plaintive airs, so that Agnes's heartache was made worse instead of better. She sat by her mother on the doorsill, Parker leaning against a tree near by. It seemed as if his melancholy strains were a reproach to her, and she could have wept. Polly, too, felt the spell of the plaintive melodies, and furtively wiped her eyes. Then her strong voice demanded something lively. "We'll all have the doldrums; it's worse 'an a banshee's wailin'," she remarked vehemently, and to please her Parker struck up "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning," which broke the spell and set Polly's foot to tapping time.

Then came the ride to the river which they desired to reach before dark, and this time Agnes sprang up before Polly, taking her mother's place and declaring that it was but fair that they should change partners, and when they reached the river, though Parker would have rowed them across, they saw Jimmy waiting on the other side, and so their host left them to glide out into the moonlight, and all Agnes had for comfort was a remembrance that to her was given his last hand-clasp as he helped her into the boat, and that she so sat that her back was toward her home, and she could behold him standing there watching, till his figure, a silhouette in the moonlight, was hidden behind the trees. At the hilltop she turned to look once more, but he had gone, and what was silver moonlight or June weather to her?

CHAPTER XVII

IN ABSENCE

THE mystery surrounding the copy of the will which had been extracted from Parker's box was solved the next week, and by no less person than Jimmy O'Neill, who came in chuckling over the discovery. "When thieves fa' oot honest folk win back their ain," he said, nodding wisely to Mrs. Kennedy, and producing a paper from his pocket. "Hump Muirhead overketched himsel', as I'll be tellin' ye. It seems he offered what's most vallyble to a backwoodsman, a good rifle, to the one of his comrades that 'ud fetch him the will, an' a dozen av em was on the lookout for it. Two av 'em kep' their eyes on Park Willett from the time he left the house here till he got acrost the river, an' seein' him give a paper to David, they turned their attention to Davy instead, but they blundered in their plans an' caught him comin' home instead o' goin'. Ivery man o' thim bein' anxious to kape his own counsel, they acted as saycrit as they could, an' they all do be watchin' their chanst; so when Parker drops the box, one av 'em is ready to pick it up, and gets out the copy, an' seein' no further use for the box, he drops it again where he

found it. Not bein' quite sure av what he's found an' not knowin' the other two has seen Park give David the will, he waits till he gits where he can examine it, an' then he carries it to Hump in full expectation of gittin' the prize. But Hump see as soon as he pops eyes on it that it's but a copy, bein' as it's written on the back av a letter addressed to Mr. Parker Willett, an' he tells the puir gawk it's no good, an' the two av 'em has words over it, an' the man, Bill Spear, brings it to me, thinkin' he'll get even with Hump by tellin' the whole tale, an' maybe do himsel' a good turn. An' —" but Jimmy stopped short, considering that it would not be pleasant information if he told Mrs. Kennedy that there were some determined men in the neighborhood who were bent on ridding the place of Humphrey Muirhead, and who were threatening to tar and feather him if he did not leave within a given time. Jimmy himself was one of the party, and he did not mean that the plans should miscarry.

Jimmy's listeners gave him strict attention till he had finished. "An' why did he come to ye?" Polly asked with a twinkle in her eye.

Jimmy answered first by a sly nod. "He knew which side his bread was buttered on. I've not a forge for nothin'." Polly understood. She had talked the matter over with her husband, and knew without being told that Bill Spear was aware that Jimmy was a leader in the plan to rid the neighborhood of Hump Muirhead.

"Alack-a-day," sighed Mrs. Kennedy. "We're a deal of trouble to our neighbors; I'd rather the will had never been found than to have stirred up riots."

Jimmy laughed. "Ye've no call to say that, ma'am; it stirs up the blood to be havin' a bit av adventure, an' there's no wan av us but's glad to sarve you. It puts naebody in a pother at all. We'll have ye settled in your own corner gin ye know it, Mrs. Kennedy. By the way, Nancy," he turned to the girl who was eagerly taking in all the talk, "I saw Davy Campbell the morn; he was up for me to shoe his mare, an' he says Jeanie would like to see ye; she's a bit av news for ye."

"Then I'll go over." Agnes looked at her mother for approval.

"Certainly go," said Mrs. Kennedy. And that afternoon Agnes set forth. She had been eager to see Jeanie in her new establishment, and was not surprised to find her singing blithely and looking as happy as possible.

She ran out to meet Agnes and drew her indoors. Everything was spick-and-span about the little cabin, and David's thought for his bride was evidenced by the many useful little helps toward her housekeeping that his busy hands had provided for her. "He is so good, is Davy," said Jeanie, showing off her various possessions with much pride. "I wish ye had a man of your ain, Nancy."

Agnes laughed. "'Tis always the way of those who're married; they're soon ready to entice others into the trap into which they have fallen."

"Ah but, Nancy, that's no way to speak of matrimony. See how happy I am, and is it strange that I should want a like happiness to come to you?"

"A girl might well envy you, Jeanie, for you've everything very comfortable," Agnes confessed.

"David has even planted a flower garden for me," the bride told her friend, "and he gets up bright and early to weed it. Did you ever hear of a man like that? Most think there's more than enough to do, but there's not a lazy bone in David's body."

"But what's the news you have to tell me, Jeanie?"

"Ah, that's the best yet; Archie is coming home for a spell, an' he'll study here with the meenister, and then go to the academy at Canonsburg, and that'll be no so far from home. Are you not glad, Nancy?"

"I am very glad for Archie."

"And you will be glad to see him?"

"Of course, Jeanie, why shouldn't I be?" But she spoke without much enthusiasm, then realizing her spiritless speech, she added: "We're old friends, Archie and I, and we've had many a good time together. I hope we'll have many another."

"I can echo that wish," Jeanie responded heartily. "Sit down, now, Nancy, and tell me all that has been going on your way."

Agnes drew her knitting from her pocket, and the two sat on the doorsill, their fingers busy with their clicking needles and their tongues going quite as fast. Agnes related Jimmy's account of Bill Spear, and as this was a matter in which both Jeanie and David were greatly interested, her piece of news was received with much attention. "David will be glad to hear that it is all cleared up. How everything is smoothing out, Agnes! I am so glad for you all. Must you go?" for Agnes had risen, and was putting away her knitting.

"Yes, I must. I promised mother I'd not stay late, for she does not like me to go through the woods alone, and I thought I would stop at Patty Scott's to see how the baby is. I heard she had been ill."

"When Archie comes, you will not have to go through the woods alone. Ah, Nancy, there are good times in store for us. We four will have many a time together. I shall yet have you for my sister."

Agnes turned to take her path toward Patty Scott's, but there was no responsive echo in her heart to Jeanie's anticipations. Archie's coming would but complicate matters for her, and she felt a heartsinking at thought of it. He would be taking up her spare moments and expecting attention from her. She must see Parker soon, and tell him of Archie's coming, and if he would but give her the chance, she would assure him that no minister's wife did she intend to be. "But," she sighed, "he takes so much for granted, and does not

seem to know that I was but flouting him that day." She pressed her hands together and looked eagerly toward the hilltop as she approached it, but no one was there waiting for her. It seemed as if she went down into the shadow of a great disappointment as she descended the hill. But there was her mother coming to meet her—her dear mother. The girl's heart outran her footsteps. "How kind of you to come to meet me, mother," she said as she came up. "I like to have you do that."

"Always?" returned her mother, smiling.

Agnes smiled consciously, then her face looked grave.

"Sit down for a moment under this tree," said her mother. "I have something to tell you. Mr. Willett has been here. Did you meet him? He said he would try to find you."

"No, I did not see him. I went around by Patty Scott's to see how her baby was."

"Then that is why he missed you. I am sorry. He left a little note for you in case he should not see you. Wait, my lamb," for Agnes had turned and was holding out her hand eagerly. "He came to make his farewells; he is on his way to Marietta. He is called home by the illness of his mother."

Agnes turned deathly pale, and whispered, "The note, the note, mother."

Mrs. Kennedy took it from the bosom of her gown, and handed it to the girl who received it with shaking

fingers. Her mother arose from the fallen log on which they were sitting and moved away for a short distance, while Agnes read :—

“I am sorry to miss you, little girl, but perhaps, after all, it is best. May you be happy in the love of that good youth, Archie. I am leaving some books which I hope you will enjoy reading. Good-by, and God bless you.

“Your friend,

“PARKER WILLETT.”

Over and over again Agnes read the note till the words seemed burnt into her brain. It meant more than an ordinary farewell. He would never understand now, and he was going back to Virginia and to Alicia. She gasped at the thought of all that the parting meant, and for a moment felt that no force could keep her from seeking to overtake him. She ran back to her mother. “When did he go? When? How long?”

“It was an hour after you left. Oh, my child, do not look so! He will come back.”

“Too late, too late,” moaned Agnes.

“Why do you say that? He will return as soon as his mother ceases to need him. She is very ill, and there is no hope of her recovery. She calls for him, and he will go to remain with her while she lives, be it a long or a short time. It should not be such a grievous thing to you, dear heart, when he will return.”

"Oh, mother, mother, you don't know. There was a misunderstanding, and it was my fault, and now I can never set him right. Oh, no, I see that I never can. Oh, mother, mother, if I had but been at home, all might have been so different. Oh, why did I go?"

Her mother put her arms about her, and led her farther under the shadow of the trees. "Dear bairn, I wish I could bear this for you, but I think he loves you, and it may all be for the best; one never knows what the trials are sent for. Do not grieve so, my lamb. I know that when troubles come to us when we are young they seem black indeed, and the day of peace and comfort a long way off; but don't despair, my dear, remember who is a 'very present help in trouble.'"

Agnes sighed, and her choking sobs ceased. "Tell me all he said, mother. It came so suddenly I was not prepared; I ought to be more brave. I am not always so cowardly when troubles come."

"No, dear, you have been the bravest of the brave. There is not very much to tell. He was not here very long, for he was anxious to be on the way as soon as possible, and I think he hoped to be able to meet you. He wishes to reach home as soon as he can. There was a letter from his sister, he said. He thanked us all for our kindness."

"And it is he who has been kind."

"So I told him. He asked for the little box of miniatures. I found it and gave it to him, but he left some

books, quite a number which he said he had promised to lend you."

Agnes was quite calm now. "Mother," she said, "I will trust and wait. You are right, we should not give way to fears. I am glad of the books; they will be a great comfort. Mother, you know—you know how I feel. I am not ashamed that I do care so much, and you said—oh, mother, you said you thought he was not indifferent to me, so I will trust and wait, but oh, mother, comfort me."

"My bairn, my lamb!" The mother's arms were again about her. "What more can I say? Be patient and endure and all will be well. It may be only a short time before he is here again, and you may be all the happier because of this parting."

Agnes lifted her head from her mother's shoulder. "Ah, yes, mother, that is comforting. I remember, too, that sometimes out of a sorrow comes joy, and I have you, mother dear, and that is so much."

But the days that followed were very weary ones; the world seemed to have lost its beauty. The thought of that empty little cabin in the wilderness would bring a pang to the girl's heart, and each evening she would climb the hill at the sunset hour to live over the happy moments with which the spot was associated. The small store of books she carried to her room to be pored over, touched lingeringly, and treasured—for had not his hands held them? Had not his eyes dwelt

on every page? Had he not followed the thought therein expressed? There was nothing that could have expressed so much or have brought such enduring association as these, and in time Agnes became so familiar with them that she could have repeated pages of Shakespeare's plays, Milton's "Paradise Lost," Addison's essays, or Spenser's "Faerie Queene." And when Archie came she quite astonished and pleased him by her learning.

This young man's coming was not delayed very long, for by midsummer he was in their midst, looking very much improved by his stay in a more civilized community. He made no delay in going to see Agnes, and eagerly asked at his first opportunity: "Are ye still heart-free, Agnes? Is there no one sitting up wi' ye?"

"No one, Archie," she replied.

"And there's none o' the lads hereabouts you like better than me? Ye've not forgotten, and ye still have the sixpence?"

"I have it still, yes." She ignored the first part of his speech.

"Ah, weel, then." Archie gave a sigh of satisfaction. He felt surer of his ground. He had been somewhat disturbed on Parker Willett's account, but Jeanie had reassured him by telling him that Parker had left the neighborhood. "Jist persevere, Archie," she said. "It's slow and steady wins the race." Nevertheless, he felt that somehow there was a change in Agnes; she

was more thoughtful and gentle, and less free with him than she had been. He approved of the thoughtfulness and gentleness, and attributed the fact of her diffidence to her feeling more conscious in his presence now that she was older. Archie was quite a self-satisfied person, and was not disposed to underrate himself, especially since he had been at his grandfather's. He had observed the deference paid to the "meenister," and felt himself quite in the position to accept all the consideration due to the cloth. "It's not to be wondered at that she is impressed by the knowledge I'm gainin'," he told himself, "and she's beginning to see that it's a high position in the world she'll be having."

But one fatal day Agnes undeceived him, and he groped for some time in a pit of humility which he had dug for himself.

It was as the two were coming home from Jeanie's one summer evening. Jeanie always did her best to show off Archie's learning, and to let Agnes know that he was becoming a person of importance. And on this particular occasion Archie was feeling specially pleased with himself, the more so that Agnes was very quiet, and he felt that she was quite impressed. He was more than usually voluble, having gained much in the art of conversation in his absence.

"I am thinking," he said, "of those days when I was in such awe of our good meenister. To be sure, Agnes, there is much dignity in the office, but it is not you that

need feel abashed by my little learning. '*Quod ignotum pro magnifico est.*'" He rolled the Latin words off his tongue with a relish.

Agnes's temper had been rising all the evening. She was not slow to notice Archie's self-complacence and she turned on him. "Speak in plain English, Archie M'Clean. You needn't try to air your knowledge before me. I abashed by you? Stand in awe of your little pickings of learning? I'll venture to say that I know more this minute about some things than you do. Can you recite me the play of Hamlet? Can you tell me when King Henry Fifth of England entered France? or who it was that wrote the 'Faerie Queene'?"

Archie looked at her in amazement. "Are ye daft, Agnes? Why should you be knowing all those things?"

"I do know them, and many other things of the same kind. There is a man, more modest than you, who has been to a great university, and yet who does not all the time be speaking in Latin, and yet I have no doubt but that he has forgotten more than you will ever know. I will answer your Latin speech with another: '*Laus propria sordet,*' and I hope you like it." She was as proud in her mouthing of the words as Archie had been. It was Parker who had taught her the saying, "Self-praise defiles," and she had repeated the Latin rendering till she remembered it, and now flung it at Archie with a scorn which completely

crushed him. He had not a word to say for some minutes, and then he remarked meekly, "I didn't know you knew Latin, Agnes."

"I don't, but I know that, and it fits the case. I've no pleasure in a man who blows his own trumpet."

"Do I do that?"

"I should think you would be well aware of it when it is your chief occupation. You bluster around here as if the universe belonged to you, and you are so puffed up with importance that there is no comfort to be had in you. Ah, but you're sadly changed, Archie, and not for the better." And Archie's humiliation was complete. Agnes, having begun to give vent to her feelings, went on. "I used to think you were as nice and modest a lad as ever I knew, but if being a minister means disobeying Paul's injunction not to be puffed up, then I'll forswear ministers, though they are the heralds of the gospel."

"Ah, but, Agnes!" Archie's voice was shocked, but he made no further protest. She had sent her shafts home with a vengeance and he smarted under the wounds. He was conscious that there was truth in what she said, and after a silence he said: "I have been puffed up, I acknowledge with shame and humility, — I, who am but the least in the sight of heaven. Perhaps, after all, Agnes, I am not fit to think of filling the holy office. I am magnifying the station and dishonoring the cause I should guard with care."

I'm forgetting that it was said that the last shall be first. Ah, Agnes, perhaps I'd better not go on."

"‘He that putteth his hand to the plough,’" quoted Agnes, sternly. "You'd best go on, Archie, and you'll learn; it's your inexperience. I've no doubt but that you'll make a good, conscientious minister of the gospel." She was turning the tables on him with a vengeance. "When you're older you'll know less, my mother says, and she says you will have occasion to learn meekness and lowliness. If you want my friendship, you will certainly have to become less of a braggart, and that right quickly." And Archie's rags of pride all fell from him.

"I'll remember, Agnes," he said unsteadily, "and I'll try not to be boastful. If I'd known ye were displeased, and that it was that has been keeping ye at your distance —"

Agnes interrupted him. "It's not that altogether for I— I— must be honest with you. I know I can never care for you as you want me to; there's no use in my pretending."

"Ah, but," Archie's voice was eager enough now, "I know why, Agnes; it's my foolish boasting that has turned you from me. I thought to win ye by self-praise, and I see that it is no way, for what a man is that shall he appear without words of his. Try me again, Agnes, and I'll try and conquer the pride and vainglory that should have no place in my heart. No,

I'll not give ye up. I've said that once and for all; not till ye marry another man."

Agnes sighed. "Then I think we'll neither of us ever marry, Archie."

"I'm no' so sure o' that," he returned with more of his old confidence.

"We shall see," said Agnes, bound to have the last word.

Yet, though Archie's companionship after this was more as Agnes would have had it, and he seemed much as he had been in the old days, Agnes herself did not change her attitude, and the lad missed something that he in vain tried to renew in their relationship. True to his word, he did not speak of his affection for her, and if the girl's heart had not been steadfast in its devotion to the young Virginian, it is quite probable that Archie, by his unfailing tenderness and thoughtfulness, would have won her over. He certainly made her summer days pass more pleasantly, and the two spent many an hour together on the river, rowing, or under the trees, with a book. Many a walk they had through the woods to Jeanie's, and many a ride they took to church, so that every one said there was no doubt but that it was a sure thing that the M'Cleans would have Agnes Kennedy for a daughter in good time.

Mrs. Kennedy was a little troubled by these reports, and told Agnes of them. "I know, mother, that people will talk. I have told Archie how I feel toward him,

and that I am willing to be his friend, but nothing more, yet he will persist, and says he does not care what the neighbors say; that they know more about it than I do. You would like to see me a minister's wife, wouldn't you, mother?" she asked wistfully.

"I do not want my lass to waste her youth in waiting for one who may never return to her."

"But you bade me trust and be patient."

"Yes, but I had not then had this." She drew forth a letter and handed it to Agnes. It was from Parker Willett. After telling of his safe arrival he said that his mother grew weaker, but the doctors gave hope that she might live a year. "In view of my protracted absence," he wrote, "I am sending to my little clearing a young cousin, whom I commend to your friendly interest. He is a boy of good character, and desires much to go to the Western Reserve; this seems an opportunity which he is very ready to take, and he will set forth at once." After sending polite messages to the family he signed himself "Your grateful friend, Parker Willett." The only mention of Agnes was in a message which conveyed his remembrances, and the hope that she was enjoying the books he had left.

Agnes refolded the letter thoughtfully and handed it back to her mother without a word, but it gave her the heartache for many a day after.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OVERTHROW OF HUMPHREY

WITH the appearance of young Carter Ritchie, the neighbors arrived at the decision that Parker Willett would not return, and that eventually this cousin of his would take his clearing. Indeed, Carter himself gave this impression, for it was not long before he knew the whole country-side, and had taken his place as a resident. His first visit, after seeking out Dod Hunter, was to the Kennedys, and though the questions which Agnes put were few, Carter was not reticent, and being always glad of listeners, he chatted on, revealing many things, and not hesitating sometimes to draw somewhat upon his imagination so that his stories might be the more effective. He was a bright, attractive young fellow, nineteen or twenty years of age, with a fresh, boyish face, pleasant manners, and a soft Southern voice. He was not slow in finding out the prettiest girls in the neighborhood, and his gallantries were soon the cause of many heartburnings.

He greeted the Kennedys as old friends. "Oh, I've heard about you all from Park," he said, "and I don't feel a stranger at all. When is Park coming back? I

don't know. Never, I reckon; there are too many things to keep him at home. He is at Colonel Southall's every day, and the colonel has two pretty daughters. Blest if I don't think Nell is prettier than Alicia; she is not of your touch-me-not kind, like Alicia, and is always ready for a good time. The colonel's fond of Park; he has no sons, you know, and I shouldn't wonder if Park found it a good thing to settle down right there; that is what everybody thinks he will do." The color which had dyed Agnes's cheeks a crimson at the hearing of Parker's name now retreated, and she was very pale.

"Aunt Lucy seems a little better since Parker came," Carter went on, "but she can't live very long, a year maybe at the longest; she's in a consumption, you know." He talked on, answering questions and giving information, till the listeners knew more of Parker's family and his affairs than they had learned in all their acquaintance with him. "Say, Miss Agnes," the lad said as he arose to go, "you and I will have real good times. Park told me he had a boat, and I am in for rowing or any kind of sport. Do you like to ride? Have you a saddle-horse? Never mind, I can get one, I reckon." And before she knew it, Agnes found herself promising to go riding, boating, walking, or anything else of the kind that Carter proposed.

"That young man's not goin' to wear out his sowl by greetin' for his home," said Polly; "it's aye grist 'at comes to his mill, an' he'll be dancin', whoever pipes."

"He certainly seems to have a flow of spirits," Mrs. Kennedy agreed.

"An' pleasant manners, an' he's pleasant spoken. I'll be tachin' him a rale Irish jig before the year's out, ye'll see. I foretell he'll make friends, but, to my mind, his cousin Park's more the man. I'd be sorry not to see him again."

"I think you will," returned Mrs. Kennedy.

The color came back to Agnes's face, and she gave her mother a grateful look, yet her poor little heart was very sore. Alicia! and he had not forgotten; the old love was the strongest. If he had never gone back, perhaps all would have been well, but now he believed her pledged to Archie, and he would return to his first love. Why had she so stubbornly allowed him to think her indifferent to him, and to believe her heart was all Archie's? She could scarce keep her thoughts from straying at family prayers that evening, but when her father read the parable of the foolish virgins, Agnes gave a deep sigh and applied it, maiden-like, to her own case; it was too late and the door was shut.

But youth, though it is easily dispirited, is also elastic, and Agnes could not be continually moping. She was ready to take such pleasures as came to her, and really enjoyed life, though she had her pensive moments when she had romantic dreams of dying young, of touching the heart of her loved one by going into a decline, but she was too healthily minded and too busy

to allow these thoughts to recur very often. She found Carter Ritchie good company; he was so full of fun, so energetic and buoyant, and likewise so pleasure-loving that he was ready at any time to leave his work for a frolic, and at last Archie became possessed by the demon of jealousy, and glowered upon his sweetheart till she brought him to account.

"What do you mean, Archie M'Clean, by looking at me as if you'd cast an evil eye upon me? What have I done that you should glower so?"

"You're naught but a shallow coquette," said Archie, blurting out his grievance.

"Have you any claim upon me, Archie M'Clean? Did I not tell you that I could not care for you as you chose I should? Have you any right to call me to account?"

He confessed he had not, but she had encouraged him to believe she did care for him in times past, and he had told her he would not give her up.

"I know you said that, but I have never deceived you, and I said I would marry you. I said that when I was but a slip of a girl; but even then I told you it would be only in case I did not see some one I liked better, and you were free to do likewise."

Archie's face fell. "Ay, then, if ye have seen some one, it's all over, and I'd as well take my way to Canonsburg as soon as I can, but it will be fey with me when I think o' ye an' that light-headed Ritchie,

though I don't want to part in anger, Agnes. We're friends?"

"Oh, yes, friends." She wondered suddenly if, after all, she could let Archie go. If she should never see Parker again, if it was as Carter had told her, that he would marry Alicia, what of herself? "I'd no like to be an old maid," she told that same self honestly, "and, after all, who better than Archie?" As a minister's wife she could give herself up to doing good, and that would be a wise and consistent thing to do. She might not be as happy as she had hoped, but she could make others happy. She looked up wistfully. "Is it of young Carter Ritchie you're thinking?" she asked, twisting the ends of her handkerchief abstractedly.

"Who else could it be? He is with ye morn, noon, and night."

"It is not he more than yourself, Archie. We are friends as you and I are, and he is content that way; we are nothing but comrades." She did not confess that half the charm of Carter's society lay in the fact that she liked to hear him talk of his Virginia home and of his cousins.

Archie's face brightened. "Then ye'll keep the same way o' thinking and ye're no changed?"

"I'm not changed this last month if that's what you mean. I feel the same toward you, Archie, but if you are going to bring me to task every time I go walking with another, I can't answer for consequences."

"I'll try to be content," said Archie, sighing, and they parted in peace.

But just about this time came an experience which, for the time being, put all else out of Agnes's head. It was Dr. Flint who brought word that matters were about to culminate in the affair with Hump Muirhead.

Agnes had seldom seen the doctor since the day of their search for Parker, and she was surprised at his making his appearance one morning, finding her housing a hen with a late brood of chickens.

"Ah, Miss Agnes, good morning," he said as he doffed his cap. "You are the very lady I wished to see."

Agnes put the last chirping, fluffy ball of a chick under its mother's wings, and arose to her feet. "I am glad to see you, Dr. Flint. You seldom come around this way."

"No, my place is so far away from this, you know. I thought, however, that I'd like to be the first to bring you the news that we're likely to be rid of Humphrey Muirhead by this time to-morrow."

"Why, what do you mean? Has he decided that, after all, it's best to go peaceably?"

"Not a bit of it. The boys are going to help him get away, and he'll not have to walk either."

Agnes began to understand. "They will not do anything cruel, I hope."

"Well, I have heard that riding on a rail is not the most comfortable way to travel."

"Oh!" Agnes was horror-stricken, for even though she knew such practices were not uncommon, she had never known any one who was so treated.

"The boys concluded," Dr. Flint continued, "that they had stood about all they were going to from Hump Muirhead, and they have about settled it that he's got to go, and that right quick."

"Is there anything new? Has he done anything else lately?"

"Well, no; but he declares there'll be war if any one attempts to get him off the place, and that it will take a few more to dislodge him than the law is likely to send, and we're about tired of hearing that kind of talk."

"Oh, but his poor wife and the children — Honey and the rest of them."

"That's so; it is hard on them, but the innocent must suffer with the guilty sometimes. The wife will have to go with her children to her father's till Hump can get her another home. He's no fool, and he can get himself a place easy enough; no fear but that he's feathered his nest well since he's had this place of your grandfather's. You see, Miss Agnes, in a country like this we must some times take the law in our own hands and use force, for there are such a lot of outrageous scoundrels that come into a new country, it's hard waiting for the law to take its course; half the time the whole facts can't be known, and justice

would never be done. If Hump was given his way, and if you took the case to the courts, it might be years before you get your rights. I have known more than one settler driven from his own property by some one that defied him to take it, and we don't intend that shall happen in this case."

Agnes was lost in thought. She was busy forming a plan. She nodded her head, for all at once it had come to her what she would do. She smiled as Dr. Flint stopped speaking. "I am sure it is very kind of you, Dr. Flint, to come and tell me. I am glad Mrs. Muirhead can go to her father's house. I suppose I know very little about such things, but I have no doubt that you will do what is right in the matter."

"Oh, it isn't I you must look to, for I shall not be in it."

"I'm rather glad of that." She smiled again, and the doctor felt flattered. "Won't you come in, doctor?"

"Well, yes, I will. Miss Agnes, I've never met your father, and I have a professional curiosity to see him. I have an idea that I might be able to help him, but say nothing about it yet," he added hastily, as Agnes allowed an exclamation of joy to escape her.

"I will take you to him now. He is in the orchard, or what we call the orchard, for our trees are young and are not bearing yet. This is the way." She led him by the path along the slope of the hill to where the young trees were being tended by Fergus Kennedy.

The man looked up with his pleasant, childlike smile as he saw his daughter approaching. "This is Dr. Flint, father," said Agnes.

The doctor greeted him cordially, eyeing him keenly all the while, "Tell me all you can about his hurt; you were there, I am told," he said in an aside to Agnes. She obeyed, answering his rapidly put questions. At the close of the recital the doctor made a rapid examination of the healed wound. "A slight pressure still," he said. "You say he gets better. The nervous shock was great, and as time has gone on, and he has had peaceful and happy surroundings, it has done much to overcome that condition. I think a very slight operation could be performed with safety. We will speak of it later."

"And could you do it? There would be no danger?"

"No more than we usually take in such cases, and I think we might venture to assert there would be none at all."

"Will you tell mother? She will be so happy; it is the one thing to make her perfectly content; she misses father so much."

"I know that. Parker told me; it was he who first interested me in the case."

Mr. Kennedy had returned to his work; he had submitted patiently to the examination, answering the questions put him by the doctor, but he took no part in the conversation that followed. It made him rather unhappy

to be an object of attention, for he was dimly conscious that all was not right, and he whispered to Agnes, "What is he going to do?"

"Make you well and happy, dear dad, I hope," Agnes returned, giving him an affectionate pat.

After a long consultation with Mrs. Kennedy it was decided that an operation should take place a little later, and the hope which the promise of it brought gave a new light to Mrs. Kennedy's eyes. The doctor stayed to dinner, but shortly after he took his departure, and then Agnes went to her mother. "I promised Carter I'd go rowing with him this afternoon," she said. "He wants to go up the river to one of the islands and have a little picnic."

Her mother smiled. "You and Carter seem to have a great many expeditions. What does Archie say?"

"Archie doesn't like it, but I told him."

"What did you tell him?"

"That Carter and he were both on the same footing, both are friends and good comrades, and nothing more."

"I am not so sure of that," returned her mother. "Take care, my child, and do not trifle with the affections of a good man."

"I am not trifling, mother. Do you think I am wrong to see so much of Carter? He is not in danger of heartbreak, I can assure you, though sometimes he plays at making love. Do you think I am wrong?"

"Not if, in the end, it makes neither him nor Archie unhappy. Run along now, and take your outing."

Agnes was eager in her greeting of Carter when he met her on the river bank. "See here, Carter," she said, "I'm going to tell you a secret, because I want your help. Will you promise on your honor as a gentleman not to divulge it to a living soul?"

"I promise," he returned, his hand on his heart, "if thereby I can serve a lady."

"Well, it is this," and she told him of the plan regarding Humphrey Muirhead. "Now, then, what I mean to do is to go and warn him. No, wait a minute; I don't mean to say he doesn't deserve it, and that he is not a hard, bad man, but then there is his poor little wife, who, I think, really loves him, and I want to spare her."

Carter considered the subject. "Yes, I think she ought to be spared, if possible," he decided.

"And so I am going to ask you to go there with me; it is not very far, once we are across the river, and we can easily walk it. You know the place is between Dod Hunter's and where you live."

"I know well enough where it is."

"And you'll go with me?"

"Most certainly."

"We'll have to give up our trip to the island, but we can go another time. I didn't tell mother for I didn't have a chance, and besides it is better that she should

not know just yet. I knew I could trust you, Carter. I don't believe any one else would have the same chivalric spirit."

Carter's face beamed. "Well, you know where ladies are concerned —"

"Of course that's it; any one else would have said, 'Don't fash yersel' about the women folk.'"

Carter laughed. Agnes never spoke so broadly as the others in the neighborhood, for her mother did not, though of Scotch descent, but her imitation was perfect. He helped her into the boat and they rowed swiftly across stream. They immediately set out for the Muirhead place, and were not very long in reaching it. Mrs. Muirhead met them with her usual frightened manner, but she smiled shyly as she saw who it was. Yes, Hump was over in the far clearing; he had Honey with him; she'd send one of the children after him.

Agnes looked at Carter. "I think maybe we'd better go and find him. We'll come back this way, Mrs. Muirhead."

They followed her directions, and found Humphrey busy at work digging out the stumps from a bit of ground, Honey established near him and chattering away in his baby fashion.

Agnes walked straight up to her uncle. "You didn't expect to see me, Mr. Muirhead, I know," she began.

He turned a scornful look upon her. "And what do you want?" he growled.

"I want to tell you that I have come into possession of a piece of information which directly concerns you, and that I have come to warn you. A number of men are coming here to-night to tar and feather you and ride you on a rail out of the settlement, and if they do not find you to-night, it will be some other night; they are in earnest, and there are too many of them for you to defy."

"And you're here to tell me this so that I can git out?" He laughed mockingly. "That's a fine scheme of yours, but it won't work."

"But it is true." Agnes was discouraged by this way of treating her facts.

"So *you* say. I've had folks try to skeer me before, but it don't do. Here I stop and there's nobody can budge me."

"Ah, but — oh, tell him Carter."

"I assure you, sir," said Carter, in a rage that any one should dare to doubt a lady's word, "I assure you that what Miss Kennedy says is strictly true. I can vouch for her word."

"And who are you that I should believe you either?"

Carter's hand flew to his pistols. "I am a Virginian, and a gentleman. You shall answer to me for your insults, sir. Miss Kennedy, I insist that you retire. No further speech is necessary with this —"

"Stop a minute, Carter," Agnes interrupted him. "I did not expect to be met with courtesy. I told you that.

It is not for your sake, Humphrey Muirhead, that I tell you this; I have taken the trouble to come here for Honey's sake and for your wife's." She laid her hand on the child's head, "And I swear to you by the affection I have for this dear, innocent child, that what I say is absolutely true. I know that we will profit by your going, but you will have to go sometime if not to-morrow or a week from now — you know that."

"I don't know it," returned Humphrey, grimly.

"You'll be put out if you don't get out," put in Carter, hastily. "There are enough men about here to accomplish it without much trouble."

"Some of 'em will never try it agin," persisted Humphrey. "I've held out against the Injuns, and I guess I kin hold out against white men by force of arms."

"O dear! he is hopeless," cried Agnes. "What can I do to make him see his danger?"

"Don't try," said Carter, curtly.

"But I must. He may defy the law, and he may commit murder, but it will be worse for him in the end. Can't you see that? Oh, you foolish, foolish man, can't you see that it will be worse for you if you stay? What if you do succeed for a time in keeping away these men, you cannot do it for long, and your days will be miserable, for you will be watched and hunted till you have to give up at last. And if you commit murder in trying to prevent attack, you will have to suffer a double pen-

alty, that which they intend for you now and that which the law metes out to a murderer. Oh, can't you see?" Agnes spoke in an imploring voice, but seemed to make no impression upon Humphrey. She clasped Honey in her arms. "Honey, Honey, oh, dear little lad, tell your father that it is all true! Ask him for your sake — say it Honey, say, 'Dad, for Honey's sake.'"

"Dad, for Honey's sake," obediently repeated the child, in his little persuasive voice.

The man's eyes sought the face of his little son, and he stood looking gloomily toward the pair, Agnes kneeling there with her arms around Honey.

A long silence ensued, at last broken by Humphrey. "I believe ye, girl. I don't see why ye did it, unless because of the young un there, but I reckon you're right, and it's all up with me. Maybe I ought to thank ye, but I feel more like—" he paused really abashed by the expression on Carter's face, for the boy was glaring at him like a tiger. "This is the last ye'll see of Honey," he added half maliciously.

Agnes gathered the little one close to her. "Good-by, and God bless you, dear little lad. I hope you will grow up to be a good man, Honey. You will forget all about your Nanny, but she will never forget you. Come, Carter." She made no further appeal to the man standing there, and but once looked back after she and Carter turned to go. She saw that he had gathered the child into his arms and his head was bent upon that

of his little son. A real compassion for him filled Agnes's heart. "I can't help feeling sorry," she murmured.

"Sorry for that brute? I'd like to have called the coward out," cried Carter. "The idea of his daring to address a lady in such fashion. If you had not restrained me, Agnes —"

"You would have fought him then and there. Yes, I know, and have given your mother cause to mourn the loss of a son more chivalrous than discreet. I thank you for your knightly intention, Sir Carter, but I think, in this instance, discretion was the better part of valor, don't you?"

"Agnes, if any one were to present you to my mother, and tell her that you were a backwoods girl, she would scarce believe it."

"She would not, and why?"

"Not because there are not some here worthy of being called gentle, but it isn't the usual type; you are more like my own people, like gentlefolk."

"And are there, then, no gentlefolk among the Scotch-Irish?"

"Many, no doubt, but they lose their manners when they are let loose in the wilderness. I do not know what they have been at home, but they certainly are a rough lot out here."

"Not all, I hope."

"Surely not all, for look at your mother; but on the

other hand, look at Polly O'Neill, and Tibby McKnight, and Mydie McShane."

"Oh, if you take them for examples, it may be true that there is an excuse for you to criticise, yet we're all one out here, and you'll be counted in with Humphrey Muirhead and Jimmy O'Neill yourself one of these days," she told him, teasingly. She was happy now that she had succeeded in her errand, and could afford to joke.

CHAPTER XIX

DR. FLINT

IT was a few days later that Dr. Flint appeared again. In the meantime Agnes had been aware of a midnight expedition, in which Jimmy O'Neill had taken part, and from which he had returned the next morning in as bad a humor as Jimmy could be in. Agnes heard his answer to a whisper from Polly, "Cleared out," he said, and the girl knew to whom he referred.

After breakfast, Dr. Flint came riding up. He and Jimmy had a conference down at the blacksmith shop, and after leaving his horse there the doctor made his way up to the house where Agnes met him.

"Well, Miss Agnes, I think you'll be moving across the river before long," was the doctor's greeting.

A smile flashed across Agnes's face. The doctor laughed. "Oh, you little marplot," he said, lowering his voice, "it was you who spoiled our little game, I know, though nobody but myself suspects. Our bird has flown, and I think I could put my finger on the one who gave the warning. I think we have to thank Miss Agnes Kennedy for a part in that transaction. Didn't you tell?"

"Suppose I did; it was a better way to get rid of

him than the other, though but for knowing your intention I suppose he would have still held out."

"Well, he's off for good and all. He must have skurried things together in a hasty fashion, for the house is cleared of anything valuable, and there's not a head of live stock left on the place. He'd no right to the cattle; but he'd not stand at that, and I suppose would have taken the house if he could have carried it; it is a wonder he didn't set fire to it."

"I suppose he thought if he did that it would bring discovery upon him, and prevent his getting away as secretly as he wished."

"You are right there; it is strange how a woman will instinctively penetrate into a motive. What time were you there?"

"How do you know I was there at all?"

"Oh, I know, but never mind; it's of no consequence now. How is your father?"

"About as usual."

"We'll see to him when you get moved and settled. I would like to have a word with your mother if she's not busy."

Agnes ushered him in, and went to call her mother, rejoicing in the fact that there had been neither bloodshed nor cruelty necessary for the overthrow of Humphrey Muirhead, and that they could take peaceable possession of their own with no distressing associations to mar the pleasure of the removal.

A few days after this she learned from Carter that Humphrey had loaded several pack-horses, gathered his stock together, and had started through the woods to a lonely spot where he encamped. He next looked about for a flat-boat, and securing one from a newly arrived settler farther up the river, he set out for Kentucky, where his wife's family lived, and so no more was heard of him.

"How did you find it all out?" Agnes asked.

"Oh, everybody knows now. The man he bought the flat-boat from told Si Fulton, and Si told somebody else, and so it got around. I am just waiting now, Agnes, for the day when you will be next-door neighbors. When are you going to move in?"

"Oh, soon. Uncle Dod has been over to see us, and he says there will be no difficulty in our taking possession as soon as we want to. Jimmy O'Neill has always wanted to have this place, and it was settled long ago that he would buy it when we gave it up. I am glad he and Polly are going to keep on living here, for I love it." She looked around pensively, and her eyes lingered upon each homely detail.

"It's a nice little place, but it doesn't compare to the other. What's to be done before you can come over? Can't I help so as to hurry up things a little?"

"I think you have enough to do as it is."

"Oh, no, I haven't. I am simply holding on till Park comes back or gives it up; I am not trying to

do more than live there. What's to be done at your grandfather's place?"

"The house is to be whitewashed and cleaned, and things straightened up generally. I don't know of anything in particular. I think we may go next week; mother is anxious to get settled." She gave a little sigh. After all, this realization of her dream did not bring the pleasure of anticipation; it would be strangely unfamiliar, and there would be no happy associations connected with that house across the river. It would be farther away from church, and from Jeanie; and Agnes realized as she never did before that there would be a real tearing up of the roots when it came time to go.

"Are you going to have a housewarming?" asked Carter, eager for fun.

Agnes shook her head. "Not now; after a while, maybe."

"But doesn't every one have them when they first move in?"

"We will not, for it is neither a new house nor are we newcomers. We are anxious to get settled and have everything as quiet as possible for father, and when he is better we shall feel like having a jollification."

"I had a letter from Park yesterday," said Carter, taking a folded sheet from out his hunting-shirt.

"What does he say?" Agnes asked, her heart beat-

ing high at sight of the familiar writing. "Is he coming back?"

"He doesn't say anything about it. His mother is failing rapidly. He gave me some directions about the place, and told me some home news; he sent his respects to all. Oh, yes," Carter's eyes scanned the sheet, "he wants to know if you are married yet."

"What did you tell him?" Agnes asked eagerly.

Carter laughed. "I haven't told him anything yet. You didn't suppose I'd write within twenty-four hours, did you?"

Agnes colored up. "Oh, no, of course not. I didn't think."

"But I know what I shall tell him," said Carter, teasingly.

"What?"

"That you're going to be."

"Oh, you must not. Don't you dare to, Carter Ritchie.—What is it, Margret?"

"Mother wants you a moment," answered the little girl.

"Then you'll have to stay out here and talk to me, Margret," said Carter; "I'm not going to be left alone."

Margret gave him a shy glance. She was a pretty little girl, now about thirteen years of age, a demure quiet body, but possessed of a steadiness and force that did not at first appear. No one could manage and en-

tertain the children as Margret did. Carter coaxed her to come out and sit by him while Agnes went indoors, and when the latter came out she found the two on the best of terms. Carter was telling about the place across the river. "I'll about live at your house," he announced to Agnes. "I wish you'd hurry up and come."

There seemed to be a great deal to be crowded into the next few weeks, for first Archie started for Canonsburg, and then came preparations for the removing. Many a trip did Carter and Agnes make with coops of chickens balanced on the little boat, or family stuffs of different kinds stowed away as best they could be, and then came the day when the last good-bys were said, and Polly running over with tears fell on their necks and mourned the departure.

"I'll be sore weary for ye, Nancy," she said; "ye've been like me ain sister, an' we've been together through thick an' thin this manny's the long day now, an' I'll no have a song on me lips for a dale o' morrows. I beeta come over often, an' no doubt I'll be neglectin' me work an' me bairns, I'll be sae sore for a sight o' ye."

"Dear Polly," Agnes returned, the tears in her own eyes. "I'll miss you, too, Polly, and I shall come over often. Ah, Polly, I'm no glad to be going. As the song says, 'Manny a canty day we've had wi' ane anither.'" The tears rolled down the girl's cheeks, but Sandy and Jock and Jessie, and even Margret, were eager for the change, and were back and forth a dozen

times before they crossed the river for good and all. Agnes was the last to leave. She lingered around as if she could not say farewell. The homely spot was crowded with associations, and not till now did she know how much she loved it.

But at last she gave Polly and the children a parting hug, and sprang into the boat which Sandy had brought over, having delivered his other passengers, and the last sight of Polly showed the good woman standing with her apron to her eyes.

It seemed quite palatial in their new home with its big rooms, now fresh and clean. Here and there could be seen from the house reaches of cleared land, and the forest seemed to recede to a great distance from the house, though a few tall trees were left for shade; but after the small cabin they had been living in, with its girdle of forest trees so near, this gave the impression of much more room both outside and in.

"Isn't it big and fine?" said Jessie. "Oh, what a big fireplace, and real steps, not a ladder to go upstairs," and eager feet were soon patting all over the house, Sandy and Jack meanwhile exploring the whole place, — the comfortable barn, the cow-shed now housing two new cows, the garden, the corn-field where pumpkins were yellowing, and the truck patch where a few potatoes and turnips awaited gathering. It is true that Humphrey had been careful to possess himself of all fruits of his labor that time would allow him to get to-

gether, and had destroyed some things which might have been of use, but his time was short, and there were still apples reddening in the sun and a haymow untouched.

Mrs. Kennedy stood at the door looking out. Her face was very sad. From this spot her father had gone forth to captivity and death; all this fair homestead had been his, and he had hoped to live here to a good old age. Agnes linked her arm within her mother's. "How do you like it, mother dear? Is it not a pleasant spot? It is home for the rest of our lives."

"For the rest of my life and for yours, too, perhaps. Does your father seem satisfied? I have not seen him for the past hour; I have been so busy setting things to rights."

"He is with the boys and they are exploring every corner. Father understands that this is home; in some way he connected it with East Pennsborough and asks such funny questions: Who cut down the butternut tree by the spring? and what has become of old Whitey? He is a little bewildered yet, but he will be very content, I am sure."

Her mother sighed. "He seems like a son rather than a husband. I miss him, oh, I miss him as he was. Those old endearing words, those little speeches of appreciation that a woman loves, never come to his lips now. He was always such a loving husband."

"But he loves you now."

"As a child would. He likes to sit by my side, to have me minister to him, to have me tell him what to do, to unravel the puzzles that confront him so often, but that is all."

Agnes understood. What her mother said was quite true. "But, mother, listen," she said cheerfully, "now Dr. Flint can come; you know he said it would be best to wait till we could be where father could have more quiet, and now we shall not have dear old noisy Polly, nor Jimmy, nor the bairns. I will tell you how we will manage: Margret can help me, and Jessie can look after Fergus, he is old enough now to know he must not make a noise if he is told to keep still, and the boys can do the outdoor work. I can do what needs to be done indoors, and that will leave you to nurse father."

Her mother gave a little convulsive shudder.

"I know," Agnes went on, "I feel so too; but Dr. Flint says he can assure us that the chances are very good, and oh, if it should be all right, the joy of it!"

"Ay, the joy of it! That is what will bear us up. I hope we can have confidence in Dr. Flint; he is looked on suspiciously by some of the neighbors."

"Yes, that is true, but I do not think for any good reason. There come father and the boys."

"Bid them come in to supper."

It was in September that the family took possession of their new home, and a couple of weeks later Dr. Flint came and took up his abode with them till he

should see Mr. Kennedy safely through the critical ordeal. The dwellers in the settlement generally stood aloof from this man, not because of his unfortunate record or because of the fatal incident that came so near losing him his life, but these Scotch-Irish were a God-fearing folk, and were fond of expressing their views upon portions of the Scripture, and were wont to discuss religion upon every occasion. Henry Flint never joined in these discussions; he never went to church, and it was believed that he was sceptical of those things which were as real to the sturdy believers of Presbyterian faith as was the fact of their own existence. It was said that he read books which at that time were spoken of only with bated breath. "He's amaisht an atheist, I hear," whispered one neighbor to another, and therefore there were those who shook their heads when it was known that he would try his skill upon Fergus Kennedy.

For days the children tiptoed about the house when they were allowed in it at all. On pleasant days Jessie took Fergus out where Sandy and Jock could watch over both little ones, and on rainy days the barn was their shelter. Margret helped Agnes indoors, and over her husband Mrs. Kennedy kept watch night and day, sharing her vigil, at first, only with the doctor. Later on good neighbors were prompt to offer their aid, Mrs. M'Cleen, Jeanie, or Dod Hunter's wife. Carter made his appearance every day with proffers of help.

Jerry Hunter and Jimmy O'Neill directed the two lads, who were trying to do the work of men on the farm, and many a good day's work did this or that neighbor do for them.

Polly, striving desperately to moderate her tones, came very often, and stealthily carried off piles of thread to be woven, or rolls of cloth to be dyed. She would do her part even though a place by the bedside was denied her. She was a good nurse, and Agnes was afraid she might feel hurt at their refusal of her offers of assistance, but that was not like Polly; she was quite as honest to herself as she was to others. "It's the wife's right," she acknowledged, "an' I've a heavy tread, an' am no so soft-voiced as some, an' it's quiet he's wantin', they say. I mind it's aye that way when there's aught wrong with the head." She spoke to Agnes.

"That is the important thing; absolute quiet," the girl replied, half apologetically. "We have to walk on tiptoe, and Margret and I scarce speak above a whisper when we're working about."

"An' will he have his wits agin?"

"We hope so, oh, we hope so."

"Yer mother's growin' pale wid the watchin', an' ye're thin yersel', Nancy, wi' the hard wark ye've had."

"Never mind me. I am well, but it's hard for mother, who is not used to being housed."

Polly gave a sigh. "I miss ye all, Nancy, an' though

I don't begrutch ye comin' to yer ain, I'm wishful fur ye ivery morn that comes. Do ye mind how I used to stir ye up wi a stick o' mornin's when ye would overslape? Ah," Polly shook her head, "them was good times we had together. Ye've not set fut on the place sin' ye lef' it."

"How could I, Polly, with so much to do?"

"Ye could not, fur a fact; it's the truth ye're tellin', fur ye don't get to meetin' o' Sabbaths."

"No, but the minister has been here several times, and every one is so kind."

"Why wouldn't they be? Was ye iver' anythin' else but kind yersel'? I tell ye, though, the men were all cross-eyed wid mad, an' grumpy as bears whin they come back from huntin' Hump Muirhead. They beeta say that ye was a blessed lass fur returnin' good fur evil, an' they says, Jimmy tells me, that ye put them all to shame by gettin' him to go, along o' yer gentle coaxin's an' pleadin's."

"How could they know that?"

"Can ye see through a millstone wid a hole in it? They beeta know, fur they puts this and that together, an' gets a holt o' it."

"It was Carter that told, I do believe."

"If he did, it was no till the settlemint was shet o' Hump, an' then he couldn't houd his blather. He said ye'd made him give a promise not to tell, but that it was no saycret an' why should he thry to kape what was

common property? He's a great wan to talk, is Carter, an' he sang yer praises to the tune av half an hour at the shop, that I know. So be, Nancy, as ye know it's no saycret anny longer, jist tell me the rights av it." And Agnes gave an account of her interview with her uncle, Polly making her comments freely.

"Carter's a gintleman," she declared, "an' I'll give him a good thwack whin I see him, for he niver told me his part. He was fair achin' fur a fight, I can see." Polly spoke in tones of admiration. "Nothin' would ha' plazed me better than to know he gave Hump a good lambastin'."

"Imagine Carter trying to whip Hump Muirhead."

"It's not always the big dog that wins the fight."

"Yes, but I am very glad it did not come out so. I think the best part was that Carter would do nothing belligerent on my account. Well, Polly, it is all done with now, and we are safely here under our own roof."

"Have ye heerd from Archie?"

"Not a line."

Polly laughed. "I've a notion ye'll not."

"And why?" Agnes was a little offended.

"We hear enough," was Polly's reply, given with an air of mystery. She put her hand over her mouth to check the laugh that would come, and at the same time she cast an anxious glance at the windows of Mrs. Kennedy's room.

"Now, Polly, tell me what you mean."

"Go 'long wid ye; I'll have me saycrits, too; ye've had yours, an' have no call to expect me to tell ye."

With this Agnes had to be satisfied. She parted with Polly at the gate where they had been standing, and promised, as soon as she could, that she would certainly come over to see her old friend.

"I've said the thing that'll fetch her," said Polly, chuckling to herself as she went on toward home.

In truth, Polly had succeeded in arousing the girl's curiosity, for the first question that she asked Jeanie when the two met was, "Have you heard from Archie lately?"

"Yes," said Jeanie, hesitatingly and with a quick, embarrassed glance at Agnes.

"And is he doing well? Does he like Canonsburg?"

"Yes;" then after a pause, "you haven't heard from him, Agnes?"

"Not a line."

Jeanie looked thoughtful. "You still insist that you do not care for Archie except as a friend? Is that so, Nancy? Did you keep to that when Archie left?"

"Yes, and I still say so."

"Do you like Carter Ritchie?"

"Oh, very much. We are good friends, too."

"He is very fond of gallanting around with the girls"

"Yes, and I think it is perfectly natural. There is safety in numbers, I tell him."

"Then you don't mind?"

"Oh, no."

"Would you mind if Archie did?"

"Did what? Gallanted around with the girls? It isn't his way, but if he did I should think—I mean if he were attentive to any one lass, I should think it meant something serious."

Jeanie laughed a little consciously. "It is strange what gossiping nonsense one hears. I don't listen to it all, do you, Nancy?"

"Why, I suppose I listen, but I don't heed it always. What tale have you been hearing, Jeanie?"

"Oh, nothing of any consequence. Tell me of your father, Nancy."

"He is steadily improving; the bandages are to be taken off to-morrow. There is no fever now, and the doctor thinks there is no further cause for anxiety; but he will not let father talk, and we cannot tell how far the trial has been successful."

"That is very good as far as it goes. Would you like me to stay and help to-night?"

"No, thank you; there is no need. He sleeps well now, and Mrs. Hunter will be here."

"Then I will go back to my man. Come and see me as soon as you can. Every one is rejoicing that you are so well settled."

Agnes puzzled over the mystery which seemed to have arisen in Archie's quarter; but she was too busy

to think very long upon it, and told herself that she could afford to wait till some one should tell her what it all meant.

The next day the bandages were removed, and for some days after the patient was kept very quiet and not allowed to talk much, but his eyes followed his wife as she moved about the room. There was a new expression of intelligence in them which the doctor was quick to note. It was one morning at early dawn that he said weakly, "Margaret."

Mrs. Kennedy came to the bedside and looked lovingly into the pale face. "Fergus, my man," she said softly.

"Margaret, Margaret, my ain han's morrow, my ain han's morrow," he said weakly, putting out his fingers to seek her hand. And then the wife sank on her knees and brokenly sobbed out her full heart in a psalm of praise, "I will bless the Lord at all times ; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." The sick man took up the words and followed her faintly, "This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of his troubles."

Dr. Flint stood with bowed head listening. There was something that touched him to the very core of his being in this renewed union of husband and wife. There was a look of exaltation on the woman's face, and the man clasping her hand bent on her eyes full of trustful love. They seemed to forget him ; they were

together in the presence of a higher power, which at that moment it seemed impossible to ignore or to distrust, and he, the man who doubted, who had told himself that there was no all-guiding hand, followed the words of the faithful as they poured them forth in the Presence, and at the end he said devoutly, "Amen."

CHAPTER XX

HER HEART'S DESIRE

IT was, of course, weeks before Fergus Kennedy could take his place among his fellow-men; there was still need for quiet, and he was spared much excitement, so that only at intervals were his friends allowed to see him. Joseph M'Clean, the minister, Jimmy O'Neill, one by one were admitted to the sick room, and at last it was permitted that the restored man should be allowed to go to church; it was the thing he most desired to do. All around the settlement the news had flown: Fergus Kennedy has his wits again, and the little log structure was crowded to overflowing that Sabbath. It was the thirty-fourth psalm which was lined out from Rouse's version, the same psalm that had come from the full heart of the wife who desired to give thanks. It was a simple and touching service, but to none more so than to Henry Flint, who sat for the first time under the roof of the little log church. He was scarcely less observed than Fergus Kennedy, at whose side he sat, and when the names of those who desired to unite with the church by letter or by profession of faith were read out, there was

a perceptible stir among the congregation when Henry Flint's was spoken. No one knew the man's intention except Mrs. Kennedy and the minister himself. "It was a good woman's prayers, her beautiful faith and trust, which I had daily evidence of, that at last brought me light," said the doctor to the minister, and the good man returned, "Ay, many a puir soul has been brought home by the gentle leadings of a woman, Dr. Flint."

It was such great joy to see her father regaining his old interest in life, and to see her mother so beaming of countenance and light of heart that it seemed to Agnes as if it would be ungrateful in her to consider that she had any trouble. Time did not dim the image of Parker, and there were days when the girl would go out into the deep woods, and, throwing herself prone on the ground, would weep her heart out. This was generally after news from home came to Carter, such news as he was quick to retail to the Kennedys, at whose house he was a daily visitor. Every one liked Carter, and his sunny presence was cheering to Agnes. She dreaded, yet longed to know of those letters from Virginia; they always brought news of Parker, and generally it was told that every one wondered if he would marry Alicia Southall. She had a string of beaux, Carter's sister wrote, and no one could tell whom she favored, though it was a well-known fact that she had taken pains to lure Parker into rejoining her train.

Agnes remembered the pencil-sketch, and wondered if Parker regretted its destruction. She inwardly exulted that he did not possess it. "She cannot rob me of those precious hours," sighed the girl, "even though I am a maiden lorn the rest of my life."

These thoughts were uppermost as she took her way one spring day to the river's brink to go over to Polly. She had never returned to the place now known as O'Neill's clearing, and Polly chid her for her neglect. "You must go," her mother said; "it is not treating Polly kindly. Come, dear, it will do you good; the winter is over and there is no longer any excuse. You are looking a little doucy." She drew her close and kissed her. "Is it still the old hurt, dear heart?"

Agnes gave a sigh. "I try, but I cannot forget, and the crumbs of comfort that a little message sometimes brings me has been denied of late, for it is a long time since Carter has heard from his cousin, and it will soon be a year, a year in June since he went away."

"Wait patiently on the Lord and he will give thee thy heart's desire," said her mother.

"My heart's desire. Oh, mother, if I could believe that!"

"If it is well for you to have it, and if you have faith, it will be yours."

"Ah, mother dear, I wish I had your faith and trust."

"See what God has wrought for us in your father's case. Ah, daughter, when I think of that, I am uplifted

on the very heights of faith. Go on, dear lamb, and do not be cast down. Give my love to Polly."

Agnes started on and was soon turning her steps toward familiar paths. From Jimmy's blacksmith shop came the sound of the hammer ringing on the anvil; from farther on came the laughter of children and Polly's singing. Agnes stood still a moment and looked around. How natural it did seem to be standing there on the hilltop looking toward the little cabin. Would she ever forget that morning when she and Polly had frolicked over the dye-kettle? She had not been so care-free since. Down the hill she slowly walked, and when within a few rods of the house Polly caught sight of her.

"Ay, ye're come at last," she cried. "I'd fain have ye to know that I've a mind not to speak to ye. Bairns, here's Nancy at last. Ah, ye little rid-headed bawbee, I've a mind to shake ye for stayin' away all this while, an' me wid me tongue achin' with the gossip 'ats ready to rin from it. But I says to mesel', I'll niver tell Nancy, not I, if I niver go to see her; not till she comes to see her auld frind will she hear it."

"What gossip, Polly?"

"Then ye've not heerd? Good luck, I say." Polly lifted her hands and brought them down on her knees as she sat down on a three-legged stool which she dragged forward. "Befoor I'd let a widdy woman cut me out!"

"What do you mean, Polly?"

Polly rocked herself back and forth in silent mirth. "It's all over the settlemint how Archie M'Clean's at the beck an' call o' a rich widdy from Pittsburg. His grandfether's deid, did ye hear that?"

"Yes, I did hear that."

"An' lef' Archie the half his estate, bein' so pleased at his takin' to the meenistry, an' Archie comin' back from Carlisle after the funeral meets the widdy, an' she sets her cap fur him from the start, so the first thing the lad knows he's well in the meshes. They say she's no so ill favored, an' that there's sure to be a weddin' when Archie gets his Reverend tacked on. The M'Cleans were ill pleased at first, but they are all but satisfied now, for though one can't call them near, they're canny, an' Archie no less so than his father. 'It's the fat pig ay' gets the maist grease,' an' so, Nancy, what do ye think o' me dish o' gossip? Didn't I promise ye fair?"

"You did, Polly. I am glad and — sorry; one doesn't like to lose a lover, though he be not the one who has won one's heart. I'd never have thought Archie would be leaving me to wear the willow."

"It'll be no willow you wear. Where's Carter Ritchie?"

"Carter!" Agnes spoke in a tone of contempt. "Why, Polly, he's but a boy."

"Where do ye get yer full-grown men? He's six fut if he's an inch."

"Ah, but that's all foolishness, Polly. I wonder Jeanie has not told me of this."

"She's nane too ready to believe it. She thinks it will all blow over and that Archie will be comin' back to ye, an' she'll say no word to ye about it. But I had it from Jimmy who had it from a man jist from Canonsburg. They say Archie an' the widdy will no jine in the bonds o' matrimony till he's ready for his blacks, but that there's no doubt she's the tight holt o' him. Weel, let him go. Ye'll not fret, lass?" Polly suddenly became anxious at sight of Agnes's sober face.

"I'll not be frettin' at loss of Archie, but I hope he'll get a good wife."

"Ay, there's naught agin her as I can l'arn. She's a bit older, but has winnin' ways, I'm told, an' is a buxom, black-eyed body. Maybe when he's out o' reach o' her spell, he'll be turnin' to ye again as Jeanie is hopin' he'll do."

Agnes gave her head a toss. "I'd not have him, Polly; he'd never have won me unless by his constancy and perseverance. Don't fash yourself about me; I'll have no heartbreak over Archie M'Clean."

"I would ha' told annybody that long ago," said Polly, knowingly. "Ye'll bide an' have a sup wid us?"

"Yes, but I must get home before dark. Sandy will meet me the other side at sundown."

"An' yer father's improvin'?"

"Yes, and is enjoying the farm and the children and it's all coming right."

After more exchanging of news, none of which was of half the interest to the two as that which related to Archie, Agnes helped Polly with the supper, then Jimmy came in and chaffed the girl about letting her chances slip and letting a widow cut her out, making his clumsy jokes and laughing loudly at them himself till Agnes arose to go.

She acknowledged to herself as she climbed the hill that she felt a little sore over Archie's disaffection; if he had proved inconstant, where could she look for stability? But there was too much here to remind her of happier days, and she repeated softly: "Thy heart's desire; He will give thee thy heart's desire." At the top of the hill she stood still and looked back, then she turned toward the river bank. As she came out of the shadows of the trees and glanced down at the sands where her boat lay, she saw that some one else had moored a boat alongside her own. "It must be Carter," she said; "he has come over instead of Sandy, for that looks like his boat; I'll just wait here for him." She leaned against a tree, waiting till he should come up, and in a moment she heard the springing step of some one climbing the steep path, and then a glad voice said, "Agnes!"

Her heart stood still. She held out two trembling hands which were closely clasped in Parker's warm grasp. "Agnes," he said. "Look at me, little girl, I

want to see those honest blue eyes. Are you glad to see me?"

"Very glad. When did you come?"

"This morning; and as soon as I could I went to call on my neighbors, but I found one missing. They told me where I should find you. And you are not married? I heard you were going to be."

"Carter told you that."

"Yes. Is it true?"

"No, it is not true. I heard the same report of you. Is that true?"

"I don't know whether it is or not."

Agnes's eyes fell, and she drew away her hands.

"Have you heard?" Parker said gravely. "Did you know that my dear mother is at peace?"

"No, I had not heard. I am so sorry for you, but it must have been a comfort to know that you could be with her all these last months of her life."

"It was my comfort and hers, too, I think."

There was silence for a moment. The girl's brain was in a whirl. He was glad to see her, but ah, if he were to be married, she must not show him how glad she was. "I have just heard a piece of news," she said at last.

"Yes? I hope it is good news. Where did you learn it?"

"From Polly. You know the blacksmith's shop is only second to the store in being a place for choice bits of gossip."

"And your news?"

"I heard that Archie M'Clean is to marry a rich widow of Pittsburg."

Parker started forward and grasped Agnes's hands again. "Then you are not going to marry him?"

"I cannot very well, it seems," she laughed lightly. "Oh, don't be afraid for me, Mr. Willet; I am not heart-broken, nor even unhappy!"

"I am glad of that, yet—"

"I did not intend to marry him. I never intended to."

"Yet you told me—"

"What did I tell you?"

"That you had promised."

"With a proviso."

"Yes, and it was that if neither saw any one more likable—ah, I see, you have found some one more likable, and so it does not trouble you. Ah, I see." He dropped her hands. "But you said you were not going to be married, then perhaps it is not settled yet."

"And you said you didn't know whether you were to be or not. I—is it—is it—Alicia? I heard—"

"What did you hear?"

"That you were every day at her father's house, and that every one supposed—"

"Persons suppose a great deal. I was there every day, because Colonel Southall is my very dear friend, and I went to take him news of my mother. Besides,

I found that I could go every day without fearing in the least to meet Alicia. She is to marry some one else, and I am very glad, for he is a good fellow and will make her happy."

"Then it is some other; her sister, maybe. Carter says she is more charming than Alicia, and if you are not certain — if you don't know whether you are —"

"I don't know, little girl; it all depends upon you. No one else in the wide world can tell me."

"On me? It depends on me?"

"Yes, if you will not marry me, I shall be sorry I came back. Agnes, Agnes, can it be that, after all, I misunderstood and that I am the lucky other fellow, the more likable one? Am I, Agnes?"

"Ah, my heart's desire," breathed the girl, lifting true eyes to his.

"Why did you mislead me and send me away so utterly wretched?" Parker asked, as they were rowing across stream.

"I didn't send you away; you went, and I was wretched, too, but I could not explain. I did not think you would misunderstand so entirely, and I had promised, though I did find there was some one that I cared more for than for Archie, but I couldn't tell you so to your face. You stayed away such a long time, that time, and I was telling myself that if you loved me, you couldn't do it, and so I tried to show you that I didn't care, for you know you had never said."

"No, I had never said half that I ought. I know now that I should have said nothing at all, or I should have told you at once how much I loved you. You would have waited for me, Agnes?"

"You know I would," she answered shyly.

"It has been a sad time, my darling little lass. I would never have returned but for the faint hope, which somehow would not be downed, that after all I might find you free, and then that mischievous Carter told me you were to be married. I wonder why he dared to say so. I have a crow to pick with him. Yet, sweetheart, out of our sorrow has come a great joy, as we used to say long ago. Do you remember?"

Agnes was looking off at the sunset sky. "I remember. I am glad it was on the hilltop that we met to-day," she murmured.

"The dear hilltop. It has been in my mind many and many a time, when I thought I had lost my dear little frontier lass. Many and many a time I fancied I could see you standing there in your linsey-woolsey gown, with your sunbonnet in your hand, and your little kerchief folded about your neck. I told my mother about you, Agnes, and though my hope was very faint, she bade me keep it alive and to come back here and try to win you. 'And if you do find that your little girl is free and that her heart is yours, give her my blessing,' she said, and my sister, too, said, 'Give Agnes my love.'"

The tears came to Agnes's eyes. She was deeply touched. "How little I deserve it," she said. "They who are such dainty ladies, if they could see me as you see me now."

"As I see you now? Ah, dear child, they would see a lady in very truth, gentle, sweet, and good, the queen of my heart and home, to whom I shall delight to do homage as long as I am her humble subject." He bent his head and kissed the brown hand lying in his. "And when I take you to your mother and ask you of her, will she give you to me, do you think?"

"Yes, I am sure she will. And there is my father, too. You know about my father?"

"I heard and was filled with rejoicing. It was from Henry Flint that I heard. He wrote and told me of what his stay at your house had done for him. I thought, maybe, Agnes, that he might be the 'more likable one.'"

"Dr. Flint? Oh, no. He seems so very much older, and he is but our good friend."

"He worships your mother, and says she is his ideal woman, and —" Parker leaned forward again, — "her daughter grows more and more like her."

It was dusk when they reached the house, but it was not too dark for the mother to see the joyful light in her daughter's eyes as she came up and put her arms about her, whispering, "Oh, mother, my heart's desire, my heart's desire!"

"My bonny lass, my little Agnes," her mother murmured, her eyes filling.

"Will you give her to me, Mrs. Kennedy?" said Parker, watching the two.

"Ay, lad; she's given herself, I see, and it's not my hand that would separate you."

"I shall live your next neighbor," said Agnes, lifting her head.

"Ah, my wean, so soon to be thinking of that," her mother answered sadly.

"I am going to find Mr. Kennedy," Parker told them, and he went out leaving the girl with her mother, to pour out her tale of happiness and to tell of Polly's gossip.

"So, mother dear," the girl said, laughing, "I am very fortunate, you see, for, as Polly says, I shall not be 'left settin',' and though you will not have the honor of being the mother-in-law to a meenister, you'll have me near you always and I shall have you, which to my mind is much better."

Presently the men folks came tramping in — Fergus Kennedy, Sandy, Parker Willett, and Carter.

"What's this I hear, you sly puss?" said Carter, making a dash for Agnes, and taking her hands to shake them heartily.

She laughed confusedly, but she held up her head, for she had no cause for shame. "How dared you tell that I was going to be married, you naughty lad?" she asked.

"Well, aren't you?" returned Carter, impudently.

"However," when the laugh had subsided he went on, "I was thinking about that time that I'd marry you myself, but I've concluded to wait for Margret," which in very truth he did. "Are you going to turn me out, Cousin Park?" he asked ruefully.

"Not till you want to go."

"I'll buy my own land, then, and set up for myself as soon as my lady-love is old enough," he said soberly. And then he crossed the room to where Margret sat covered with confusion.

The news of Parker's return spread quickly through the neighborhood, and the next day brought Polly and Jeanie to hear the truth of the report which Carter had not been slow to scatter abroad. Polly fairly hugged Parker in the exuberance of her joy at his return, and though she maintained that there was no one good enough for Nancy, she was mightily pleased when she was told of what she called Parker's luck. Jeanie was relieved to be free to give her news of Archie, though she insisted that it was all Agnes's fault, and that her brother had been obliged to go elsewhere for consolation when Agnes jilted him. It was plain to those who in years after met the Rev. and Mrs. Archie M'Clean, that the good man had been unable to withstand the widow's subtle flattery, which she was well versed in using, but which was no part of Agnes's art of pleasing, though in all cases it will win a man whose bump of self-esteem is a match for Archie's.

It was in October that Parker and Agnes took possession of their little home, and there was a great housewarming, which those for miles around attended. They were all there, the friends who had stood shoulder to shoulder with the young couple when they first started to win their way in the wilderness—Dod Hunter and his strapping sons, the M'Cleans, all but Archie, Jeanie and David Campbell, Dr. Flint, Jimmy O'Neill, and last, but not least, Polly, who was the life of the occasion, and, it is reported, nearly persuaded the minister to dance an Irish jig, so "delutherin'" was she, but it was Carter who told this, and its accuracy may be judged accordingly. Carter, be it said, vied with Polly in his lively efforts to make every one have a good time.

And when the fun and feasting had become a thing of the past, one evening Parker and Agnes climbed the hill that overlooked O'Neill's clearing. Hand in hand they stood looking at the sunset, Agnes very serious, feeling a little the weight of her new responsibilities.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked her husband.

"I have been thinking of the years to come. We are pioneers, Agnes, but we have a great future before us. We are soon to be a state; even now the wilderness begins to blossom like the rose. Those dangers of the early days will never be ours. We shall grow and enlarge our borders and open the way for others, who will

strike farther and farther west. We have crossed our mountains, dear, and the way is plain before us." Such was the man's thought. "And of what was my wife thinking?"

"Of our home; of whether I shall ever disappoint you, and whether I shall learn to be like my mother, so strong, so helpful, so patient; if I could but be to you what she is to my father."

"You are now, my brave little lass," said Parker, drawing her close. "You are all that, strong, and helpful, and patient, and when we are an old, old couple, I shall say to you, as your father so often says to your mother, 'Ye are my ain hand's morrow.'"



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